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COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**COVENANTAL FAMILIES IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

BY
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APPROVAL SHEET

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Abstract

When God establishes his everlasting covenant with Abraham it includes his offspring (Gen. 17:7-8). They were heirs of God's promises and their inclusion in the visible people of God was ratified by their circumcision. These future families born unto Abraham were to keep faithfulness by circumcising their heart (Deut. 10:16). This covenantal structure was the primary vehicle through which God would bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). The people of God in the Old Testament were viewed through the covenantal lens of the family and were to instruct their family to keep the ways of the LORD through obedience to his word (Gen. 18:19, Deut. 6:7).

When it comes to the interpretation of the New Testament can it be assumed that the same covenantal structure exists? The administration is now under Christ, but have the core components of the eternal covenant changed? It is common to read the New Testament through a Westernized individualistic view, leading to an "every man for himself" mentality. This hermeneutic assumes a sharp discontinuity between the testaments, undermines the unity of the Bible, and atomizes the people of God. It would have been foreign to the New Testament authors. Paul, in Romans 4:11-12 and in Galatians 3:14, shows that Christ has come as a fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, thus bringing the Gentiles into the family of faith. In the synoptic accounts of Jesus' blessing of the children, Jesus welcomed them into his arms, touching and blessing each child. These were Jewish children, heirs of Abraham. It was fitting that Jesus welcomed them because they belonged to him. In his Pentecost speech, Peter echoed an Old

Testament pattern by telling the Jews who were present that the promised Holy Spirit is “for you and your children and for all who are far off” (Acts 2:38). He assumed a covenantal grace runs through the line of generations. This is confirmed and upheld in the οἶκος formula found later in Acts. Reverberations of covenantal grace and responsibilities are also found in 1 Corinthians 7:14 and Ephesians 6:1-4.

The aim of this study is to show continuity between the eternal covenant to Abraham and the new covenant under Christ. In fact, because it now includes the Gentiles, it is continued and expanded. The covenantal structure, which includes families of believers, remains intact. Though not explicitly stated, there is evidence for this in the New Testament. Recovering and affirming this view is a great encouragement and comfort to the people of God. By way of God’s grace they have been placed into the visible community of faith and are exhorted to lay hold of his promises from the heart.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear wife Courtney and our four beautiful children. They have sacrificed more than I know for the fulfillment of a dream. I could not have done this without their constant love and support. I also thank my parents for encouraging me to pursue my desires. My friends and coworkers at Calvary Church were quick to provide understanding and affirmation during this process.

For these precious people, I am grateful.

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Introduction: What is a Covenantal Family?

Clarity on the definition of terms is imperative to understanding communication. In order to better understand the concept of a covenantal family, the question of “what is covenantal grace” must first be answered. Grace is usually seen to operate underneath two umbrellas, common grace and saving grace. Common grace is the grace of God that is bestowed upon all humanity. It restrains sin so the world is not as evil as it could be, but also provides God’s creatures with sun and rain, food and fellowship (cf. Gen. 9:11; Matt. 5:45). Even though unbelievers are still in Adam, common grace enables them to be under God’s tender watch-care so they too may contribute to the common good of humanity. Saving grace, on the other hand, is that grace that God gives his elect, enabling them to respond positively to his call for repentance and faith. It is that effectual grace that places believers not only in the visible church, but also the invisible church.

At this point a distinction has been made. There are those who are joined to God’s visible people who do not embrace God’s promises from the heart, and there are those who do, though it is not for us to know. C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, provides a helpful discussion of this notion centered around the definition of “Christian,” claiming that “it is not for us to say who, in the deepest sense, is or is not close to the spirit of Christ.”¹ In other words we cannot see or say who belongs to the invisible people of

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), xiv.

God. He goes on to say that any man who accepts the Christian doctrine but lives unworthy of it should be referred to as a bad Christian rather than a non-Christian. Those who are under the umbrella of saving grace are known only to God. But how does one become a member of the visible church? How can one become a participant in the holiness of the people of God by being placed into that sphere of life that is dependent on God's forgiveness?

The answer is covenantal grace. This is the third umbrella that is often left out of the discussion of grace among Evangelicals.² It comes into effect through the sign of circumcision in the Old Testament and Baptism in the New Testament (Col. 2:11-12). As a part of God's covenant with Abraham, he required Abraham and every male in his household to be circumcised (Gen. 17:10). This was a "sign" that would serve as a reminder of God's faithfulness to his promises. It also set God's people apart and was a requirement for identification and fellowship with the community of faith (Ex. 12:48). This membership had its privileges as God blessed his people with protection, provision, and empowerment for mission, should they remain faithful. Through God's covenantal grace they experienced a "holiness" and "cleansing" (i.e. it set them apart for God's purposes). This covenantal grace should not be confused with saving grace; it is not automatic that all who are placed into the visible church will circumcise their heart (Deut. 10:16). This grace (covenantal) came through the male head of each family, as he was the representative of the household. He was to instruct his family to maintain faithfulness to the covenant Lord (Gen. 18:19). By maintaining covenantal faithfulness, these families in Abraham's lineage would bring blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:3).

² I am indebted to Robert H. Orner for the analogy of the three umbrellas of grace.

A covenantal family is a family who has received the covenantal grace of God, through his promises to Abraham, to be made full participants of the visible people of God. For most, this is a clear teaching in the Old Testament due to the explicit nature of the revelation. The question of whether this can be found and sustained in the New Testament is the purpose of this paper. I will show that the promises to Abraham are continued and expanded in Christ, and as a result, the structure of God's covenantal grace to families remains intact.

Chapter 2: A Question of Hermeneutics

The Burden of Proof

The aim of this chapter is to show that the burden of proof is on those who would hold to a discontinuity between the Testaments regarding the promises to Abraham. I will also briefly touch on a few passages underscoring the general thrust that the Abrahamic Covenant is still operative in Christ. Though the scope of this paper is not wide enough to address the topic of the unity of the Bible, we must answer a few hermeneutical questions in order to lay a helpful foundation. As we come to the Scriptures, we are seeking to work with the text that God has given us, that is to say that we acknowledge the existence of an author, a recipient and a shared world between the two that can aid us in interpretation. We are assuming that the biblical writers speak in good faith and have an intended meaning aimed at a competent reader in the first audience.³ So we must seek to ascertain to the best of our ability as we interpret the Scriptures how a competent reader would have understood and applied the given passage.

In the history of Biblical interpretation it can be said broadly that there are two main ways of viewing the unity of the Bible. First, there is the dispensational approach, which emphasizes a discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. In this view, the New Testament may draw its principles from the Old Testament but it is primarily

³ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 5-7. There Collins explores the ideas of “good faith” as a moral component to exegesis and “competent reader” as one in the original audience who adequately understands the communicative intent.

seen as replacing and rendering invalid the Old Testament.⁴ The New Testament believer derives understanding of faith from the New Testament alone and concepts carried over from the Old are those that are explicitly stated.⁵ Some of the roots of this development can be seen in the 18th and 19th century where “the Bible” was slowly becoming identified as “the New Testament” and by implication, God was divided and there were two ways of salvation, one for the Jews and the other for Christians.⁶ This has led to problematic understandings of law, grace, salvation and faith. The God of the Old Testament is played off against Jesus in the New Testament. This approach isolates the New Testament from the Old Testament, which is misguided and dangerous. The New Testament grew out of the Old Testament and both are used to aid in interpretation of the other. God is framing one story together, not two, whereby he brings his promises of redemption to fulfillment in the Christ event, thus unifying both Testaments. Paul underscores this when he tells Timothy that all Scripture is “breathed” by God and profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16).

Over against the dispensational model is the covenantal approach. This approach tends to emphasize the continuity of the Bible based on a covenant through which God works out his plan of redemption. Through this covenant God binds himself to a group of people through a representative. This framework sees God working through a series of covenants that build and expand upon one another. The mediation and terms of the

⁴ There are always exceptions but this is the main paradigm of a dispensational hermeneutic.

⁵ Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 19.

⁶ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1991), 266-267.

covenant may change but the formal structure remains the same. God sees the individual's responsibility to faithfulness through a covenantal and communal lens.

“Since God has not changed the terms of church membership, new covenant believers and their children are likewise included in his church...The people of God in the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament are one and the same people.”⁷

One significant point of difference between the two main ways of viewing the unity of the Scriptures is that the covenantal model underscores God's work through community while the other undermines it. The dispensational course emphasizes God's redemptive work based on the individual's salvation, while the covenantal approach, not being unconcerned with individual redemption, sees that individual as a part of a community with whom God has covenanted. Within that community, the household and its successive generations play a significant role in God's plan.⁸ The family unit is a microcosm of the people of faith; God relates to members of the household as members of the family just as he relates to members of God's people as members of that community.

When we come to covenantal families in the New Testament we acknowledge that there are no explicit texts granting this concept. It is borrowed from the Old Testament and needs to be shown to remain operative for those that are now in Christ (cf. Gen 17:9-14, 18:19; Deut. 6:4-6). However, does the burden of proof lie with those who would assume continuity between the Abrahamic promises and the advent of Christ, or with those who would assume discontinuity? In the coming of Christ we find the

⁷ Booth, 73.

⁸ Ibid., 25.

fulfillment of the ancient promise that all the “families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). But does this fulfillment mean the end or the continuation of the Abrahamic story? Abraham was promised that his offspring would be blessed along with him. It was a promise to him, the representative, that included his household as well, that is to say, his future children. This had implications for how Abraham and his offspring were to view their children. They, through God’s promise, would have God as their covenant King and they would be his loyal subjects. Through this and their circumcision, the males and their representative households, were considered members of the visible community of faith and exhorted to lay hold of this faith from their heart (Deut. 10:16). If one holds to a continuity between the testaments something similar may be said concerning the Christian family. Though he is speaking concerning the sign of baptism, John Frame puts it this way:

We can assume continuity with the Old Testament principle of administering the sign of the covenant to children, unless New Testament evidence directs us otherwise, and this is the paedobaptist approach. Or we can assume that only adult believers are to be baptized, unless there is New Testament evidence to the contrary, and this is the antipaedobaptist (= “Baptist”) approach. On the first approach, the burden of proof is on the Baptist to show New Testament evidence against infant baptism. On the second approach, the burden of proof is on the paedobaptist to show New Testament evidence for it. In this case, deciding the burden of proof pretty much decides the question, since there is little explicit New Testament evidence on either side and since the two parties are essentially agreed on the Old Testament data. It seems to me that the first approach is correct: the church of the New Testament is essentially the same as the church of the Old.⁹

These comments are in the same sphere of concern and provide a helpful framework for the discussion. My argument is similar; the burden of proof lies with those who would

⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 270.

stress discontinuity over continuity concerning the promises to Abraham. The promise to Abraham, that the nations be blessed through him, could only be upheld if the people of God were faithful to their covenant Lord. Only through Christ are these promises realized. The fact that Christ is now leading his people in bringing light to the Gentiles accentuates the need for continuity of the Testaments (Isa. 49:6). The administration of the new covenant of grace is new in that it broadens in extent and application. It brings the blessings promised while retaining the fundamental elements of the original covenant of grace.

God covenants in Gen. 17:7 with Abraham, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your offspring after you” (καὶ στήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου ἀνὰ μέσον ἐμοῦ καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον σοῦ καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σπέρματός σου μετὰ σὲ εἰς γενεὰς αὐτῶν εἰς διαθήκην αἰώνιον εἶναί σου θεὸς καὶ τοῦ σπέρματός σου μετὰ σέ). He reiterates this in v. 9, commanding Abraham’s offspring to be faithful to his covenant and establishes the sign of circumcision with infant boys. This is so they and their progeny may be heirs of God’s covenant promises with the aim of bringing blessing to all nations. Prior to God’s judgment upon Sodom, he shows how and why this promise will come about. Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation through commanding “...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” (Gen. 18:19). Abraham was fatherless when the LORD spoke to him, but God still included his heirs in the promises showing that he is the God of

Abraham and his “offspring” (σπέρματός) after him. No one denies this is how God has worked in the past, but what about present day Christians?

Help from a Reformed Baptist

Because the dispensational model is largely espoused by Baptist theologians, we will look to their own camp for a discordant voice. Though there are many in the Baptist camp who would not agree with upholding certain aspects of the Abrahamic covenant, the same cannot be said for all. In his work, *Children of Abraham*, David Kingdon shows how he as a reformed Baptist finds continuity between the old era and the new. In an attempt to clarify the arguments between dispensationalist and covenantal viewpoints he rightly acknowledges that the key issue is understanding the relationship between the Testaments.¹⁰ Some who would claim that the concept of covenantal families is an Old Testament concept and has no bearing upon us today often dismiss certain teachings in this realm as belonging to “Old Testament teaching,” thereby drawing a sharp dichotomy between the two and potentially exalting the New Testament as superior. Kingdon speaks to his own camp when he criticizes this simplistic and broad approach, asking, “...if one writes off the Old Testament in such a fashion what then becomes of the unity of the Bible?”¹¹ What then indeed! The NT authors are picking up their place in the story and helping the church to play their part in God’s unfolding drama, a drama that did not start, but rather finds explanation in the Christ event.

¹⁰ David Kingdon, *Children of Abraham: A Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* (Worthing, England: Henry E. Walter, 1973), 15.

¹¹ Ibid.

Kingdon also points out several key texts indicating the Abrahamic covenant was not annulled by the Mosaic, and is further in effect now under Christ (Gal. 3:14-29).¹² He finds evidence for unity in the book of Acts showing that Peter declared, “Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers saying unto Abraham, ‘And in thy seed shall all the kindred’s of the earth be blessed’” (Acts 3:25).¹³ In his sermon at Solomon’s Portico, Peter addresses the men of Israel, pointing them to Christ in repentance and faith. He reminds them of their identity as Abraham’s heirs and that Christ as the true heir has come to bless them by turning them from their wickedness. Earlier in the book of Acts Luke records Peter’s Pentecost sermon as he shows how the promised Spirit “...is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”¹⁴ For Peter, the relationship between Abrahamic promises and the administration of Christ is now “...continuity with expansion.”¹⁵ This will be explored further in chapter 3. Those who sharply distinguish between the old and new are at a loss to explain these statements and others that presuppose unity in the Bible.¹⁶ Kingdon agrees with and holds the same view of the Scriptures as many in the Reformed camp and shows the appeal of reading the Bible through a covenantal structure. The one covenant of grace that God makes with fallen

¹² Ibid., 17.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ C. John Collins, “What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part II: Additional Studies,” *Presbyterian* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 94. This is likely an adaptation from Deut. 29:29, “...but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever...” (τὰ δὲ φανερά ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ἡμῶν).

¹⁵ Kingdon, 17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

human beings to be their God and the God of their offspring runs throughout the course of history (Gen. 17:7, Lev. 26:12).¹⁷ He critiques his tradition, saying:

A great deal of Baptist apologetic, so it seems to me, has failed to come to terms with the indubitable fact that the covenant of grace, although it exhibits diversity of administration in the time of promise and in the time of fulfillment, is none-the-less one covenant.”¹⁸

The concept of the one covenant of grace streamlines the biblical narrative and allows for proper redemptive historical differences in application. He is right in affirming the exhibition of diversity in administration as long as he allows each administration to dictate where the diversity lies. It is clear under Christ that aspects of the Mosaic Covenant have been annulled due to the high priestly sacrifice of Christ and his abolishment of the need for the Levitical system (Heb. 10:1, 10). He accomplished this not in the destruction but rather the fulfilling of the law (Matt. 5:17-20). This is fitting because Christ has come to lead his people in bringing light to the nations not by calling them to one centralized location but by dispersing them over the face of the earth. No such annulment is present for the Abrahamic covenant. I will now take a closer look at two Pauline passages that highlight the continuity between Abraham and Christ.

The Father of All Who Believe

In his elaboration on justification by faith in Romans 4:1-12, Paul draws upon Abraham to show that it is faith, not circumcision that is essential for righteousness. He does so in order to show how Gentile families can now be a part of the family of Abraham.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

Paul quotes Psalm 32 in vv. 7-9, showing that David understood that the blessing of divine forgiveness comes through faith apart from works. He then makes no attempt to offer his own interpretation but appeals to Genesis 15:6, which declares that Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness (καὶ ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην).¹⁹ God's righteousness grants a forgiveness that does not depend upon circumcision but faith alone. This faith is the key to understanding how the gentiles have come into God's redemptive story. Paul bolsters his argument by adding a chronological element in v. 11. Which came first, Abraham's circumcision or his righteousness by faith?²⁰ He received this righteousness of faith (σφραγίδα τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεως) prior to circumcision. The phrase "that he had" or "which was his" are both paraphrases of the definite article τῆς, in which both translations attempt to highlight the personal force.²¹ Τῆς πίστεως is functioning most likely as a genitive of source: "righteousness that has its source in faith."²² Abraham's faith secured the righteousness signified in his future circumcision.

There should be no distinction between "sign" and "seal" (σημεῖον and σφραγίδα) because both are there to show that circumcision ratifies, confirms and authenticates the

¹⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 224.

²⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2004), 235. The Rabbis hold that it was around twenty-nine years later that Abraham was circumcised.

²¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 268. It is more likely to be taken as modifying πίστεως as it signifies the adjectival function of the phrase "in his uncircumcision" (ἐν τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ).

²² Ibid., 269.

right standing that Abraham already had by faith.²³ As Calvin notes, it seals and ratifies the righteousness of faith.²⁴ Circumcision, a sign to the Jew of their covenantal membership was never to be construed in such a way as to be indispensable to righteousness (Gen. 17:10).²⁵ Neither is the uncircumcised person at a disadvantage in lacking the sign, because righteousness depends on faith. “Sign,” “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” (σημεῖον, περιτομῆς, ἡ ἀκροβυστία) all occur in the LXX in Gen. 17:11-13.²⁶ Paul draws on this passage to show that circumcision, which came much later in the Genesis narrative, is that outward sign pointing to the reality in which it signifies in Gen. 17:11, namely the covenant made by God not only with Abraham, but with his seed also.²⁷ Verses 11b and 12 advance the argument with two main purpose clauses that both depend upon 11a.

Abraham is especially revered as the father of the Jewish nation (Rom. 4:1). In a way salvation was practically limited to the nation of Israel. This meant that one could become a “child” of Abraham through incorporation to the nation by birth, or occasionally, conversion.²⁸ Although, it is important to note that proselytes were

²³ Schreiner, 225.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 89.

²⁵ Ibid. Calvin notes that this is neither unprofitable nor superfluous.

²⁶ Cranfield, 235. Because περιτομῆς is a genitive of apposition or identity, the sign consists in circumcision.

²⁷ Ibid., 236.

²⁸ Moo, 269.

forbidden from calling Abraham “our father.”²⁹ Paul shows in vv. 11b-12 why Abraham both was made righteous prior to circumcision and why he later received the sign of circumcision. “To make him the father...” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πατέρα) introduces the first purpose clause and will be implied in the second clause in v. 12. The first clause focuses on the Gentiles and the second on the Jews.³⁰ This happened so that Abraham may be the father of Gentiles who believe apart from circumcision, and confirmed as the father of Jews who are circumcised and believe. Nestled in between these two clauses is the result clause, “so that righteousness might also be reckoned to them” (εἰς τὸ λογισθῆναι [καὶ] αὐτοῖς [τὴν] δικαιοσύνην).³¹ Paul shows that the righteousness of faith is sealed to the Gentiles in the same way as it was to Abraham, highlighting the continuity of the one covenant of grace.³² Some argue that these clauses rest upon v. 10 but with the presence of the independent clause introduced in v. 11 it is not likely that 11b-12 refer back to v. 10.³³ Additionally, verse 11 functions this way logically because it mentions both Abraham’s circumcision and his righteousness by faith while he was not yet circumcised.³⁴

²⁹ C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last: A Study in Pauline Theology*, 1st ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962), 31.

³⁰ εἰς is not repeated in the second clause but is there functionally and is appropriately brought out in the ESV translation, “The purpose...and to make him.”

³¹ Cranfield, 237. These purpose clauses are not separate meanings but really could be seen as one large purpose clauses expressing the same result for Jew and Gentile.

³² Calvin, 90.

³³ Cranfield, 236. Moo, 268. Moo and Cranfield argue against Barrett, who thinks that v. 11a is a parenthetical remark about the significance of circumcision, with the purpose clause in v. 11b dependent on v. 10b. The indication that Abraham is the “father of circumcision” in the continuation of the main purpose clause in v. 12 shows that the statement is dependent upon v. 11a., especially since it affirms that Abraham received righteousness prior to circumcision.

³⁴ Twice in this passage Paul emphasizes “faith” by connecting the righteousness granted by God with “believing” (πιστευόντων).

Paul could have begun this statement focusing on the Jews, who would have had priority in salvation history and would be the natural heirs of the promises. He mentions this sequential order elsewhere (Rom. 1:16). However, in 4:11b, he points to Abraham's uncircumcision first to emphasize the inclusion of the gentiles into the Jewish people.³⁵ Abraham can function as the father of all who believe apart from circumcision because he was reckoned righteous prior to circumcision. Paul alludes here to the promise in Gen. 12:3 that guarantees Abraham's blessing to all families of the earth.³⁶

Paul is concerned with showing a kinship to Abraham in which faith, not circumcision, is decisive. However, it would be a mistake to think that in emphasizing one point that he is against the other. He picks this up in v. 12 with the purpose clause now continued and applied to the Jews. This portion of the clause articulates the reason that he is made the "father of the circumcised" (καὶ πατέρα περιτομῆς). The faithful are those descendants not having circumcision only, but those following in the footsteps of faith that Abraham had (ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἔχουσιν τῆς πίστεως). Paul is not denying the reality of the special relationship of the family of Jews "according to the flesh" (κατὰ σάρκα).³⁷ Circumcision is important, but must be properly understood in its relationship to faith. To the Jews belong the promises and the law and they too, possessing faith, are the true heirs of Abraham.

This proposed interpretation is met with the difficulty of the repetition of "those" before "walking" (τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν). Since it is found after περιτομῆς, the οἷς...τοῖς

³⁵ Schreiner, 225.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cranfield, 238. Romans 4:1.

presence may suggest that two different groups of people are suggested in v. 12. It could be that the first set of Abraham's children are those who are circumcised and the second are those who walk in faith.³⁸ It is more likely Paul is referring to the Jews twice in this verse based on two points. First, it is congruent with the parallelism found in the major purpose clause in 11b-12. Second, Paul consistently uses the terms περιτομή and ἀκροβυστία throughout these verses to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles.³⁹ Paul uses περιτομή in a spiritual sense and makes this clear (Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:11).⁴⁰ Though the syntax is a bit awkward, it still shows Paul teaching that Abraham is the father only of Jews who have faith. It is this faith sealed with their circumcision that sufficiently unites them to the people of God.⁴¹

Abraham in Galatians 3:14.

We now turn our attention to another Pauline passage. In Galatians 3:14 two summative statements of Paul's argument show that it is precisely because Christ is upholding the promises to Abraham that Gentiles can be justified by faith. In writing to a largely Gentile populated church, Paul is addressing the problem being stirred up by the Judaizers who are seeking to coerce the converts there to be circumcised in addition to their faith. They are likely appealing to Gen 17:9-14, where circumcision is perpetually required for Abraham and his descendants.⁴² The Jewish opinion connected with

³⁸ Schreiner, 226.

³⁹ Moo, 275.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, 226.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 35.

Abraham was that it was through this circumcision that Abraham reached perfection. It follows that Gentile Christians must follow in his steps of having faith and completing this faith with circumcision.⁴³ Paul here defines and clarifies that it was faith alone that merited God's righteous declaration. The church in Galatia is a group of converts who are manifestly Christians and received the Holy Spirit by faith (3:2).⁴⁴ The issue put to the Galatians is this: how does one become a member of the family of Abraham? Some will say that it is through circumcision even as Abraham was circumcised, but Paul will show that it is faith, not the keeping of the law, that grants one right relationship with God.⁴⁵ Paul spends most of chapter 3 using Abraham as an example to show how he was justified by faith before he was circumcised and therefore Gentiles, exercising that same faith in Christ, can be his Abraham's offspring.

Leading up to verse 14, Paul shows those who do not keep the whole law are under a curse (v. 10) and are in need of redemption (v. 13). By keeping the law Christ has become this curse on our behalf, being hung on the cross (v. 13). This is "...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως). Paul's argument that those who share in Abraham's faith can be credited with the same righteousness (vv.5-6) concludes in this verse with two purpose clauses signaled by "so that" (ἵνα) and bring to a point the two main themes of this section and the previous one:

⁴³ Barrett, 31-32.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 219.

(1) the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, and (2), the promise of the Spirit received by faith.⁴⁶ The second purpose clause could be subordinate to the first and show Paul teaching that the Gentiles receive Abraham's blessing so that they then can receive the promise of the Spirit.⁴⁷ Alternatively, they are coordinating, both referring back to the main clause in 3:13. Paul teaches that Christ has undone the curse of the law so Gentiles would receive Abraham's blessing, and this blessing is to be recognized with the promise of the Spirit. This latter option is more attractive for two reasons: (1) The link between righteousness that comes by faith and the gift of the Spirit in Gal 3:1-6 noting "just as" (καθὼς), (2) Paul likely alludes to Isa 44:3 where blessing and outpouring of the Spirit are shown in the simplest Hebrew parallelism, supporting the notion that "blessing" and "Spirit" refer to the same reality.⁴⁸

Paul here is focusing on the universalist promise in the Abrahamic covenant, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."⁴⁹ This is what he refers to in "the blessing of Abraham" (ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ). How can the Gentiles be part of God's covenant people? Through the promises of God to bless the nations. These converts have, through faith, received the promised Spirit. The notion of "receiving the Spirit" (τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν) conveys acceptance by God. These unclean outsiders are now

⁴⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 123. These are clearly purpose clauses but C. F. D. Moule points out that "the Semitic mind was notoriously unwilling to draw a sharp dividing-line between purpose and consequence." The point being that Christ redeems us from the curse of sin for the purpose/result that we received the blessing of Abraham that is the promised Spirit.

⁴⁷ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 219.

⁴⁸ Longenecker, 123. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 219.

⁴⁹ Barrett, 34.

made worthy receptacles of God's presence through the sacrifice of Christ. Christ is the true "offspring" of Abraham, the one referenced in the first "good news" who could come through the line of humanity and crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). Since Gentiles, who by definition are unclean because they are outside the Mosaic legal system, were to be blessed along with Abraham, the blessing cannot be tied up with legal concentrations.⁵⁰ Paul reaches back through redemptive history to the gospel of grace revealed to Abraham (v. 8) and clarifies how this has come to fruition and furtherance in Christ.⁵¹ The gift of the Spirit given through Christ clarifies rather than obscures the blessings given to the patriarch. It is through faith that these Christians obtain the position as sons of Abraham.

Our Story is Their Story

Both Romans and Galatians show that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, but it was not his faith that put an end to the evil powers admitted to creation through Adam's sin. His faith was not as universally effective as our parents' rebellion. Nonetheless, his faith allowed for God to bless his descendants and through them bear the ultimate descendant, the seed who could usher in universal blessing. Paul shows this in Gal 3:16 where he refers to Christ as the "seed" (σπέρματι) of Abraham.⁵² It is through this "one," that the families of the earth can be a part of God's eternal

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1994), 243.

⁵² In referring to Christ as the true "seed" he does not by implication cut off the notion of children born to Christians. "Seed" is understood in Judaism to refer to the posterity of Abraham as a corporate entity. By being united to Abraham, the covenant representative, one can be united to the covenant Lord. Similarly here, by being united with Christ as the new covenant representative.

covenant. The many, if they have faith in Christ, are united to him and thereby united to Abraham's family (Gal 3:29).⁵³

These two passages show that Christ has come as a fulfillment of the promises to Abraham invoking the consideration that there are other aspects of the Abrahamic promises for New Testament believers to consider (cf. Gen. 12:3, 15:5, 17:7-8).

Abraham's descendants and their families were made members of the covenant community by way of God's promise.

R. L. Dabney put it this way:

We understand that the new dispensation is an extension of the old one, more liberal in its provisions, and its grace: and embracing the whole human family. It would be a strange thing indeed, if this era of new liberality and breadth were the occasion for a new and vast restriction, excluding a large class of the human family, in whom the pious heart is most tenderly interested.⁵⁴

The following chapters will show that the new covenant leaves intact the fundamental elements of the original covenant and continues the application of grace for families in the covenant.

⁵³ Longenecker, 158. This is precisely what Paul shows in v. 29 by way of first class conditional sentence, εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.

⁵⁴ R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985), 786.

Chapter 3: Let the Children Come

Introduction

In much of Christian history the people of God have regarded their children as a blessing and “heritage from the Lord” (Ps. 127:3). This is especially true of the Reformed tradition as defined in its great creeds. This is where the covenantal approach and the dispensational approach part ways. Both would agree that a professing baptized adult is a part of the visible church, though the dispensational view arguably still sees this person individualistically and separate from their family, taking an “every man for himself” mentality.

When it comes to children born to believers, the dispensational view holds that they are not and cannot be members of God’s visible people until they are old enough to understand and profess their faith.⁵⁵ The covenantal approach views the church’s children as bona-fide members of both the covenant of grace and the church of God. Composed in 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 74, addresses the position of infants born to believer, stating:

...they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; (a) and since redemption from sin (b) by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult...

⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2008), IV, xvi. 17. Calvin provides a helpful argument that spans larger than just children prior to an age of understanding. His claim is that God’s regenerating ability can’t be denied simply because it remains beyond ours and their understanding.

A separate but similar document, the Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV, ii claims that infants should be baptized because it is an ordinance of Christ and a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. These promises of God to these children are effectual, but not automatic. Those who are placed into the visible community of faith by God's grace are exhorted to embrace those promises for themselves. They need to circumcise their heart (Deut. 10:16). Both documents find scriptural support across the Testaments, (Gen. 17:7, Mk. 10:13, Matt. 19:4, Acts 2:38-39, 10:47, and Col. 2:11-13).

The Gospel's affirm this position in their portrayal of Jesus' interaction with little children. This chapter will concern itself with the pericope of Christ's welcoming and blessing of these children. I will use Mark 10:13-16 as a base reference and when necessary show the relationship of Matthew's and Luke's account of the same story (Matt. 19:13-15, Lk.18:15-17). The aim is to show that in Jesus' act of welcoming the children he affirms the status of children as visible members of the people of God and lays a foundation of covenantal families in the New Testament.

How They Came

Mark places his account of the blessing of the children just after Jesus' teaching on divorce and the story of the young ruler. In following the pronouncements on the sanctity and permanence of marriage this narrative is an appropriate sequel.⁵⁶ In typical Markan style he states succinctly, "And they were bringing children to him..." (Καὶ προσέφερον αὐτῷ παιδιά). Matthew and Luke use the same verb here, although Matthew chooses the aorist passive form (προσηνέχθησαν) while Mark and Luke use the imperfect. Mark

⁵⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 359.

employs ambiguous terms describing this initial action: the verb may mean “bring” without conveying the idea of carrying (Mk. 7:32). The same term for child (παῖδια) is used to describe a girl of twelve years of age (Mk. 5:39-42).⁵⁷ The imperfect is likely conative (“were trying to bring”) which, is supported and clarified by the rebuke to the disciples to “stop forbidding” (μὴ κωλύετε).⁵⁸ All are in third person plural but the subject is indefinite (“people”; cf. the “crowds” of v. 1).⁵⁹ None of the accounts reveal who it was that brought the children to Jesus.

Luke tells us that even “infants” were brought. Possibly, their parents brought them hoping for a benefit or blessing. The children could have been brought by their mothers but the masculine pronoun in the statement of the disciples rebuked them could point to the possibility of their fathers, or even older children bringing younger ones.⁶⁰ These families were Jewish and under God’s covenant with Abraham. In bringing their family member to the Lord they were promoting their spiritual flourishing. While the circumstances are put forth without any clear reference to time and place the situation is clear; children were brought to Jesus with the intention of requesting his blessing and touch. Mark’s interest does not lie in those who brought the children, nor does he identify those who the disciples rebuke or why the disciples rebuked them. He is interested solely in the response of Jesus.⁶¹ The indefiniteness of details is “...vintage

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Lynn A. Losie (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 93.

⁵⁹ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 544.

⁶⁰ Lane, 359.

⁶¹ Gundry, 544.

Mark, who often blurs contextual details in order to accentuate the word and work of Jesus.”⁶²

Who was Brought?

Mark and Matthew use the term *παιδία* to describe the children. This is reminiscent of Mk. 9:36-37 where the concept of “children” is represented by “the child” (*παιδία* or its form throughout) and in fact this passage must be read in light of the former.⁶³ The term is generic for “child” and typically belongs to those under the age of 13, which is when a Jewish male reached adulthood.⁶⁴ In Matthew, it is the normal word for children without reference to the very young (cf. in 11:16; 14:21).⁶⁵ However in the Markan account, Jesus subsequent action where “takes them in his arms” leads the reader to think that quite young children are involved.⁶⁶ Luke supports this reading in departing from the other two evangelists by describing the children as “infants” (*βρέφη* or *βρέφος*). This term is more specific than “child” and in Luke 2:12 and Acts 7:19 it refers to young babies.⁶⁷ Remarkably, Luke employs the term to describe John the Baptist who is still in his mother’s womb (Lk. 1:41, 44).⁶⁸ Luke clarifies any obscurity. The point is that

⁶² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 306.

⁶³ Gundry, 545. Some have argued against the inauthenticity of this passage but the distance between the two stories show’s Mark’s regard for chronology, assuming otherwise the passages would be coupled or conflated.

⁶⁴ Edwards, 306.

⁶⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 727.

⁶⁶ Lane, 359.

⁶⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1469.

⁶⁸ Thayer’s Lexicon also shows Homer and Plutarch using this term to refer to an embryo or fetus.

children ranging from infancy to pre-teen were brought to Christ for the purpose of his touch (ἵνα αὐτῶν ἄψηται) and blessing (κατευλόγει).

Do Not Hinder

The disciples offer a word of rebuke (ἐπετίμησαν) and cut the children off before they can reach the master.⁶⁹ This term is frequently used by Mark. In 8:32, Peter rebukes Jesus for alluding to his death, and in turn Jesus rebukes Peter for opposing the things of God.⁷⁰ Jesus exorcises demons, rebuking them in 1:25 and 9:25. In 10:48 the crowd will rebuke blind Bartimaeus for pleading for mercy.⁷¹ The disciples' motive is not explained nor is it clear whom they warn to stay away, but Jesus' response challenges their assumption that children have no claim on his attention and like Peter, they do not have in mind the things of God.⁷² While in Luke it is the disciples who "behold" this phenomenon, in Mark it is the Lord who "beholds" the disciples' prevention of the children.

This incites an emotional response from Jesus; "he was indignant and said to them" (ιδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἠγανάκτησεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς). The phrase reveals Mark to be the omniscient narrator; he knows the inner feelings of Jesus.⁷³ Here he differs from the

⁶⁹ Luke adds ἰδόντες, showing that the disciples "behold" this initiation and then offer rebuke.

⁷⁰ Evans, 90. In an attempt to clarify who the disciples are rebuking and to avoid the misunderstanding that they are rebuking the children themselves, A D N W Z F read "but his disciples were rebuking those who were bringing." B C L and other authorities read what is noted here, which by way of time and obscurity, is the better reading.

⁷¹ Ibid., 93.

⁷² France, 727. Edwards, 306.

⁷³ Gundry, 544.

other evangelists in that they completely leave out any emotion from the account.⁷⁴ The word for indignant means “to arouse to anger, to vent oneself in expressed displeasure rather than simply brooding about it.”⁷⁵ A person’s indignation reveals their deep seated values. Jesus’ anger at the obstacle shows his compassion and defense of those who wish to be in his presence.⁷⁶ The disciples will express their indignation over the request for the best seats in the kingdom (10:41), and again when the woman anoints Jesus’ head with perfume (14:4).

The statement of the disciples rebuke opens with an adversative δὲ for contrast. Likewise, the introduction to Jesus’ response begins with an adversative δὲ for contrast to their rebuke.⁷⁷ He issues two commands to the disciples and sharply tells them to “permit” them into his presence and “stop forbidding” them. Matthew and Luke join the imperatives with the conjunction καὶ, while Mark’s account is asyndeton, thus sharpening the present prohibition.⁷⁸ The two commands are identical in all three accounts (ἄφετε, μὴ κωλύετε) with the second imperative best translated as “stop forbidding.” The context demands that it conveys a cessation of the present activity.⁷⁹ This phrase is reminiscent of the independent exorcist in 9:38-40, a passage set alongside the earlier one on children

⁷⁴ Lane, 359. Similarly in 10:16, “he took them in his arms” connotes affection. Mark uses this word to express strong emotion in 1:41, 43, 3:5, 7:34.

⁷⁵ Edwards, 306.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gundry, 544.

⁷⁸ Lane, 360. Asyndeton makes his account more emphatic at this point.

⁷⁹ Evans, 93. Gundry, 544.

(9:33-37), where the disciples are also told there to “stop forbidding” him. But what grounds does Jesus have for wanting the children to come to him?

It is because the kingdom of God belongs to them (lit. “for of” or “belonging to such ones is the kingdom of God,” τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ). Mark is concerned with the kingdom of God in his gospel and shows that in Jesus the kingdom has drawn near and those who receive Jesus receive the kingdom (1:15). Now in a provocative statement he claims that even children are heirs of the kingdom; i.e. they are placed in the community of faith under the reign of Christ. Word order doesn’t necessarily imply emphasis, but here with “of such as these” (cf. 9:37 for similar order) the emphasis is intentional. Interpreting “receiving the kingdom” as a possessive genitive will clarify whether “child” is nominative or accusative in the next verse.⁸⁰ The kingdom of God belongs to those who are of no apparent importance. It is their solely on the ground that God has willed to give it to them (Mt. 11:25) rather than some inherent subjective quality of the children.⁸¹ Based on the previous incident where Jesus places a child in the midst of the twelve as an object lesson and example, he shows that these little ones deserve reception even as one receives him. This statement sheds light on the gross mistake of the disciples who attempt to forbid their coming. It is astonishing not merely that Jesus wants them to come for a teaching aid, but that he receives them and “...even assigns God’s kingdom to them.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Gundry, 544.

⁸¹ Lane, 360.

⁸² Gundry, 544.

Like a Child

Jesus now will capitalize on this teaching moment to shake the hardness of the disciples' hearts. He turns this opportunity into instruction, saying in Mk. 10:15 "truly I say to you, whoever might not receive the kingdom of God as/like a child, that one will in no way ever enter into it," (ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὃς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν). Matthew omits this part of the incident while Mark and Luke are identical (Mk. 10:15, Lk. 18:17).⁸³ The first clause with the presence of the subjunctive is an indefinite relative clause (ὃς ἂν μὴ δέξηται) indicating a generic subject.⁸⁴ If it was a light thing for Jesus to first receive the children then to use their child-likeness as model recipients of the kingdom the presence of οὐ μὴ along with the subjunctive confronts this notion. But what is it about the children that makes them worthy heirs of this honor?

Children, especially little ones, are often praised for their innocence, spontaneity, and humility. Idealizing a little child is more consistent with a modern pop-psychologizing of the text rather than a thorough historical cultural understanding. True, Matthew underscores that humility is the prerequisite for becoming like little children, but that pertains mainly to the necessary attitude change required from the disciples, not indicating a quality that children inherently have. Luke 18:15-17 also underscores that it is humility that the disciples need to emulate. Receiving the kingdom "like a child" is tantamount to humbling oneself before God.

⁸³ Matthew likely leaves this out due to the presence of it in a previous interaction, cf. 18:3.

⁸⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 478. The construction is roughly equivalent to a third or fifth class condition with the difference of contingency not being one of time but of person. The next clause here underscores this notion.

In the ancient world children were not highly valued. Amongst the Romans, boys were valued due to their continuing the lineage while girls, if unwanted could be left out for exposure. A papyrus dated Alexandria, June 17, 1 B. C., contains a letter of instruction from a husband to his expectant wife, “if it was a male child, let it live; if it was a female, cast it out.”⁸⁵ Though Jews detested this practice, it is possible to find a non-sympathetic view of children amongst their writings. Women and children derived their position in society from their relationship to adult males. Childhood was generally regarded as an unavoidable interim between birth and adulthood, reached at age 13. In Jewish and early Christian literature there is no parallel to the tenderness Jesus shows here.⁸⁶

On the other hand, it could be argued that Jesus views were not necessarily unique amongst the Jews. Latter Rabbinic literature points to some approximate parallels. According to *b. Sanh.* 110b Israelite children will enter the world to come: “Rabbi `Aqiba said: ‘They [the children] will enter the world to come, as it is written, “The Lord preserves the simple” [Ps 116:6].’”⁸⁷ The evidence is mixed at best, but it is clear that the disciples here have failed to keep in step with Jesus’ example and teaching; they have participated in the culture while Jesus deviates from it. Many have attempted to focus the comparison here on the qualities in a child that should be emulated. What parallel is there amongst children and their receiving the kingdom that aids in interpretation of this verse? The answers are broad and varied. Vincent Taylor thought it was mainly in the

⁸⁵ Lane, 361. The Jews and Christians both rejected this practice.

⁸⁶ Edwards, 306.

⁸⁷ Evans, 94.

“receptiveness of the child.”⁸⁸ Others have claimed that they are unselfconscious, receptive, and content to be dependent on others.⁸⁹ Lester Bradner argues that the key is in the smallness of the object. The point is that the children are little and Jesus is saying, “minister to the small, and you will stand with the great.”⁹⁰ Some of these have stronger possibilities than others, but what is clear about the children is that they are helpless and dependent. These qualities don’t merit anything towards God’s grace but make them open and receptive to it. The point is that Jesus receives them, points to them as model recipients and then scoops them up and blesses them.

Another point of departure among scholars is whether to take *παιδίον* as the subject of the clause, rendering it, “as a child [receives the kingdom of God],” or as a direct object, “[as one would receive] a child.” One puts the possession of the kingdom with the child, the other equates receiving a child with receiving the kingdom. The matter is not simply resolved. Is *ὅς* to be thought of in a temporal sense? It is commonly used in the New Testament as a temporal conjunction. Read in this sense the meaning would be a literal one, unless the kingdom is received when a person is young, he or she will never enter it.⁹¹ See Mark 9:21 and 14:72 for other temporal uses. Surely Mark is used to recounting the “hard sayings” of Jesus, so this interpretation cannot be dismissed on those grounds. This is also a practical reality. Many church leaders know the statistics that 80% of Christians accept Jesus before turning age 18. Eubanks seems to

⁸⁸ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1955), 421-422.

⁸⁹ D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, Pelican New Testament Commentaries (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), 268.

⁹⁰ Lester Bradner, “The Kingdom and the Child,” *Anglican Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (May 1920): 61.

⁹¹ Larry Eubanks, “Mark 10:13-16,” *Review and Expositor* 91 (1994): 403.

agree with the interpretation as it underscores the necessity of evangelism and Christian education for children.⁹² Though these are both necessary, this view doesn't gain traction on the basis that the disciples would have been past this point of temporality, and the presence of a temporal use elsewhere doesn't necessarily indicate its use here.

It could be that Jesus wants the disciples to receive children into their elite circle, thus taking παιδίον in the accusative. This does have the draw of harmonization when read alongside 9:33-37. On the road to Capernaum the disciples have been arguing who is the greatest but find themselves tongue-tied when Jesus probes for information. He then takes a child and puts him in their midst and claims, "whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." One can't help but notice the parallel language between the two passages. There however, Jesus does not mention kingdom nor are the disciples preventing children from coming, but the point rather that Jesus identifies with a helpless child. If one receives a little child, they receive Jesus and consequently the Father himself. Taken this way, the child represents another category of those marginalized (like women, the poor, and the unclean).⁹³ This category is an invitation for the disciples to enter into a new reality of community, where the "least" becomes a model for discipleship, thereby exposing the disciple's failure to understand Jesus' announcement in 9:31 and implicates them for the incriminating behavior.⁹⁴ This sheds light on 9:35 if interpreted metaphorically in 9:36-37; "a child" figures "Jesus," who in turn figures the one who

⁹² Ibid., 405.

⁹³ James Bailey, "Experiencing the Kingdom as a Little Child: A Rereading of Mark 10:13-16," *Word & World* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 59.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 60.

“sent” him.⁹⁵ Textual support can be found in linguistic overlap of 9:37 and 10:15. Both begin with words that are translated “whoever,” “receive,” and are concerned with children. Matthew 25:31-46 appears to have a similar theological claim—by practicing hospitality and care for the “least,” one receives and cares for Jesus.

Children are not blessed for what they have to offer but rather what they lack; they come as they are—powerless and overlooked, the dispossessed of society.⁹⁶ In contrast to Western ideals and affluence, where children are typically guaranteed care and money for their welfare, the child of the Greco-Roman and early Jewish culture was the epitome of vulnerability.⁹⁷ This sheds light on the notion of humility found in these accounts; it is characterized by helplessness and dependency. The neuter gender of *παιδίον* makes it possible to be read in the nominative case, thus, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child receives it.” This has typically been the interpretation, and perhaps for good reason.⁹⁸ In 9:37 the disciples are implored to receive a little child and consequently will receive Jesus. In Mk. 10:13 the children are receiving Jesus precisely in their coming. The disciples in turn can receive the kingdom not by the action of receiving a child, but by coming themselves to Jesus in a childlike manner.

The interpretation of *τῶν... τοιούτων* in v. 14 favors a possessive genitive. A qualitative genitive would imply that the kingdom has the characteristics of children,

⁹⁵ Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 189.

⁹⁶ Edwards, 307.

⁹⁷ Bailey, 65.

⁹⁸ Evans, 94. Lane, 360. Edwards, 307. Gundry, 547.

which is unsustainable. The –ούτων, “these,” in τοιούτων restricts the referent to the children at hand and its possessive nature point to the child’s receiving God’s kingdom and thus having it in possession in the next verse (v. 15).⁹⁹ The comparison of God’s kingdom to a child is contrasted with the view that God’s rule is a treasure and valuable pearl (Matt. 13:44-46).¹⁰⁰ To read “receives God’s kingdom” after “as a child” is a more natural flow with the structure than supplying “one receives” or “I receive” between “as” and “a child.” The phrase “receives God’s rule” better echoes the preceding clause and synchronizes better with the statement that God’s kingdom belongs to children who come to Jesus.¹⁰¹

Textually this view has more support but there is room conceptually for the accusative reading. No doubt that Jesus does mean for the disciples and later followers to be receptive to children simply because they are vulnerable and needy. Showing compassion to them follows the manner of Christ, and while the receptiveness to any marginalized person cannot merit God’s favor, it may exhibit a heart touched by kingdom values. This shows that the kingdom is both a gift and task. It is first a gift, something only God can give. To receive God’s kingdom means to submit to his end time rule. The phrase “whoever does not receive” gives “kingdom” the dynamic meaning of “rule” and

⁹⁹ Gundry, 544-547.

¹⁰⁰ This is read against the backdrop of the denigration of children in the ancient world.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 551. These are the strongest display of the weaknesses of reading “a child” as the object.

shows that God's rule has arrived, making it available for reception (1:15).¹⁰² It is a task in that we are invited into responsible action in our reception of the vulnerable.¹⁰³

Touching and Blessing

The original intent of bringing the children to Jesus was for the purpose of his touch, but now Jesus goes beyond that. He scoops up each child in his arms, (ἐναγκαλισάμενος, lit. "to place one's arms around, to embrace") places his hands upon them and blesses them (καὶ ἐναγκαλισάμενος αὐτὰ κατευλόγει τιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ' αὐτά). Mark dramatizes this event in order to show his approval and acceptance of them. In 9:36-37, he was displaying the way his disciples ought to accept a child, but here he is emphasizing his own approval of children as newcomers to him.¹⁰⁴ Jesus' willingness to add his personal touch to common people was a distinguishing mark of his ministry and became characteristic of the movement he founded. By this act of embracing, blessing and laying his hands upon them, Jesus goes drastically beyond the mere touch, which was intended, and in doing so highlights their possession of God's kingdom and assures their entry into it.¹⁰⁵

In what way were they blessed? The iterative nature of "he blessed" shows they each received individual attention (κατευλόγει should be taken as an iterative imperfect, but could possibly be read as an iterative historical present).¹⁰⁶ Mark uses the intensive

¹⁰² Ibid., 545.

¹⁰³ Bailey, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Gundry, 545.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 549.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. This also means that he spoke a blessing upon them while laying hands on them.

form here of “bless” (κατευλόγειν), found nowhere else in the NT.¹⁰⁷ Though Matthew’s episode lacks the intensity of this climax, the intent of the children to be blessed is on the front half of his account. It could be compared with the practice of bringing children to the elders or scribes for blessings on the evening of the Day of Atonement, which was common in Judaism.¹⁰⁸ It could also be read against the backdrop of blessing in Genesis. Noah blessed Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9:26-27), Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27; 28:1-4), and Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48-49). Such blessings tended to be related particularly to the passing on of one’s name or property. “A father’s blessing establishes the houses of his children,” states Sir. 3:9.¹⁰⁹ The precedent for Jesus’ actions is more likely Gen. 48:15 rather than following a scribal tradition.¹¹⁰

J. Duncan Derrett in, “Why Jesus blessed the Children,” goes to great length to show that this passage could not be understood unless carefully read in light of Genesis 48. Jesus blesses the children analogously with Jacob’s blessing and in somewhat parallel circumstances. In so doing, he further develops the theme once enhanced by Jacob, that the children through the blessing are promised an inheritance, and if they embrace it by childlike faith, are co-heirs of God’s kingdom.¹¹¹ The comparison is that

¹⁰⁷ Evans, 94. In the LXX it is found in Tob. 11:1, where Tobias blesses Raguel, and in Tob. 11:17, where Tobit blesses his new daughter-in-law Sarah.

¹⁰⁸ France, 727. Bock, 1469.

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, 308. A typical fatherly blessing of a son is that of Gen. 48:20, “May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.”

¹¹⁰ Gundry, 551. The idea that this is on or after the Day of Atonement would have a stronger argument for Jesus to be similar or surpassing in nature to the Scribes if we were not on the other side of the calendar from that Day in Mark. Regardless his hugging and blessing goes beyond what the scribes did on that Day. This is contrary to J. Jeremias (*Infant Baptism*, 49).

¹¹¹ J. Duncan Derrett, “Why Jesus Blessed the Children,” *Novum Testamentum* 25, no. 1 (1983): 3. Derrett draws mainly upon Midrashim and the Masoretic text.

the child is now receiving the promise of a future inheritance. Derrett posits that the embracing in v. 16 signifies a welcomed co-inheritance by Jesus.¹¹² The blessing, with the laying on of hands, interacts with Gen. 48:1-20 to show that Jesus, like Jacob, “refused to recognized seniority.”¹¹³ Though he may go too far in his conclusion, Derrett provides the helpful component in showing that the blessing that passed to Ephraim and Manasseh are the continuation of the blessings conferred on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The children coming to Jesus are naturally Jewish children, it is proper for them to be recognized, embraced, and blessed by him. This follows the conventional pattern for the children of the promise.¹¹⁴ When read in this light, it is arguable that Jesus likewise in his blessing shows the continuance of the promises to Abraham. Could the prefix *κατα*- imply that blessing, the promise of salvation, flows through his hands onto the children? The complex form of the verb at least stresses that even children are elevated to the promised heirship of God’s kingdom.¹¹⁵

The laying on of hands in Mark appears in a variety of contexts. In 5:23 he lays his hands on a seriously ill daughter. In 6:5 he lays hands on a few sick people and they are healed and in 8:23 he lays his hands on a blind man in order to restore his sight. Jesus uses his hands quite frequently for healing, but it is clear that in 10:16 blessing is the intent rather than healing.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid., 10.

¹¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁵ Gundry, 545.

¹¹⁶ Evans, 95. He argues from this flow of thought that divine power exuding from Jesus, whether to heal or benefit in some other way, is probably an underlying assumption.

Is this Passage Sacramental?

This passage has polarized scholarship over the claim that Mark has intended it as a basis for paedobaptism and the more difficult issue of “baptismal regeneration.” It is difficult to see when looking into the passage alone how baptism is present, but the practice of the early church points to this possibility. The argument forms around v. 14 with the presence of “do not hinder” (μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά). The pericope of course, is about receiving and blessing, not baptism, but it does provide a positive context for the consideration of infant baptism. Joachim Jeremias emphasizes that this passage has nothing to do with baptism, but is ‘pre-sacramental’.¹¹⁷ Indeed the question of infant baptism would not be under consideration during the composition of Mark.¹¹⁸ He goes on to show however that this incident not only had a historical place in the concrete situation of Jesus, but also the preaching and teaching of the primitive Church.

The second *Sitz im Leben*, by the placement of the passage between divorce and wealth, finds the early Church handing down the story as a little catechism that instructed how disciples of Jesus should look on marriage, children and possessions.¹¹⁹ The middle section of the instruction says, “Hear how the Saviour calls the children, how he promises them a share in the eschatological salvation. To lead children to him is the task and responsibility of Christian parents.”¹²⁰ But it was more than that for early Christians, it was also a command to give the children to Christ through baptism. The

¹¹⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 49.

¹¹⁸ This assumes an early date for Mark.

¹¹⁹ Jeremias, 50.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

first place this passage appears in early Christian literature is by Tertullian, writing around 200, who shows the words “permit” and “do not forbid” were generally understood as an exhortation for them to be baptized.¹²¹ The *Apostolic Constitutions*, dated likely in the fourth century, grounded their view that young children should be baptized on the words “do not forbid them.”¹²² Κωλύειν was shown by O. Cullman, in drawing attention to a series of baptismal texts (Acts. 8:36; 10:47; 11:17), that it occurs so regularly as to suggest a formula.¹²³ As early as the first century, whenever anyone would come to faith, inquiry was made as to whether any hindrance existed, i.e. whether the candidate had really fulfilled the conditions. There existed an analogous practice among Gentiles who wished to be baptized into the Jewish faith. The purity of his motives must first be tested. It is likely that the practice of the Church followed the Jewish pattern at this point. Cullman’s thesis was limited solely to the New Testament, whereas E. Molland has shown the survival of κωλύειν formula in reference to baptism in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: ‘What hinders my being baptized today?’ (13.5.1).¹²⁴ Cullman argues that this continued existence of κωλύειν was the *terminus technicus* for the refusing of baptism, which then has consequences for our interpretation of Mark 10:14. He and Jeremias conclude that this passage, combined with the early church practice of infant baptism, contains indirect references to baptism and makes

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM Press, 1950), 74.

¹²⁴ Jeremias, 50.

appeal to the way of Jesus, which was to permit the children to come to him unhindered.¹²⁵

No one disagrees that by the time of Chrysostom (d. AD 407) and Augustine (d. AD 430), the churches were regularly baptizing their members infants. There is earlier evidence however if one considers Polycarp's confession at his execution of his serving Christ for "eighty and six years." Dating his death between AD 155 and 167, this would take us back to somewhere between AD 69 and 81 for the beginning of his service. In Polycarp's day, one dated his discipleship from the time of his baptism. This puts Polycarp beginning his discipleship at his infant baptism during the age of the apostles.¹²⁶ Calvin argued that since the children were permitted to Jesus in order to receive the promise of the kingdom, which is the sum of blessing sealed through baptism, how could they be denied baptism?¹²⁷ The correlation in language between this narrative and later baptismal liturgies indicate the early church perceived the significance of this story for the baptism of infants.¹²⁸

Examining this passage in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin's explanation of why Christ embraced these infants as his is because he wished "...to give an example by which the world would understand that he came to enlarge rather than to limit the Father's mercy...".¹²⁹ What else could he mean by "enlarge rather than to limit"

¹²⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁶ C. John Collins, "What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part II," 98.

¹²⁷ Jean Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1945), 390-91.

¹²⁸ Edwards, 308.

¹²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1329.

but pointing to the expansion of the eternal covenant now inaugurated under Christ? The continuation has to do with the children born to believers, the expansion to the Gentiles. He goes on to say that the baptism of infants attests that they are contained in God's new covenant family. Even if one wishes to separate this act from baptism, it cannot be ignored that in the receiving, embracing, laying on of hands, and prayer, Christ himself "...declares both that they are his and are sanctified by him."¹³⁰ Indeed it is proper and fitting that they come to him because they belong to him.

Why it is Fitting for Children to Come to the Lord

This chapter has shown that Jesus welcomes little children into his presence and emphatically takes them into his arms. He blesses them because they are heirs of the promises to Abraham. The implication is they are visible members of the church and should be welcomed as such. This welcoming includes a nourishing and exhorting of the child to exhibit childlike faith, a continued dependence on Christ for salvation. But how does this passage fit into the larger context of redemptive history? How can we view this story in light of God's unfolding drama? This question is answered in showing whose children they are.

As Derrett and others have shown, these were Jewish children, that is to say, children of Abraham. As such, they were included in the Abrahamic covenant, a covenant that as chapter 1 has shown, included Abraham and "...those youths within his household of sufficient age and intelligence to exercise personal faith in the God of Abraham and infant offspring as well" (Gen. 17:12).¹³¹ This helpful passage provides a

¹³⁰ Ibid., 1330.

¹³¹ Robert Reymond, "Children in the Covenant" (lecture, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, TN, July 23, 1979).

guardrail against “baptismal regeneration.” Here the promise is clearly combined with the necessity that children embrace God’s promises by God-worked, childlike faith. In other words, his promises are effectual, not automatic. On the plains of Moab Moses reconfirms this covenant with second generation Israelites after the exodus. He implores them to carefully follow the terms of this covenant, including in his address women and children (Deut. 29:9-13). Joshua reviews the covenant terms at Mount Ebal, keeping step with Moses and again explicitly addressing the women and children (Josh. 8:35). Jehoshaphat prays for Judah’s military victory over Moab and Ammon before the Lord, in the presence of “all the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones...” (2 Chron. 20:13). In graphic terms the LORD speaks through the prophet Ezekiel, when they had gone after other gods, saying:

“And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whoring’s so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?” (Ezek. 16: 20-21)

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of promises to Abraham, but he is preeminent to Abraham. He was and is the very God of Abraham. The reason that it is fitting that children are welcome by Jesus is precisely because they are his. By virtue of being children of promise, before they belonged to their parents’ namesake, they belonged to the Lord himself. They belong to him because they are heirs of his promise; a promise that continues through the line of generations unto the children of believers. It is a promise of covenantal grace that is for covenantal families.

Chapter 4: Promise and Pattern in Acts

Introduction

This chapter aims to show that the promise in Peter's Pentecost sermon refers to the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:17, 39; Joel 2:28), but also has a covenantal connection with the promises to Abraham and his offspring. Following this, Luke recounts several occasions where "households" (οἶκος) come to faith. This serves to underscore the notion that God's promises are for generations to come and all who are "far off", by way of the family unit (Gen. 12:3, 22:18). I will focus on the culmination of Peter's Pentecost sermon (2:37-39) and subsequently highlight how this shows itself in the οἶκος formula in the later parts of Acts.

This portion focuses on the crowd's response to Peter's Pentecost sermon. Luke records the initial event of Pentecost (1-13), which precedes Peter's speech that connects the outpouring of the Spirit with Jesus' exaltation as Lord (14-36). This induces a response; the crowd wants to know what they must do in light of their culpability for the crucified Christ. Peter summons them to repent and be baptized, thus identifying themselves with Jesus and receiving forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of the atonement of Christ, the promised Spirit is given for everyone, those present, their children, and those near and far, all whom God calls.

Cut to the heart

The Spirit is poured out on the Apostles and results in their speaking in tongues. They are then accused of being drunk early in the morning, which evokes Peter's sermon to

them. He had demonstrated that Joel's promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit and David's promise of the coming of the Messiah had both been fulfilled in the life, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus.¹³² He shows that the outpouring of the Spirit has ushered in the "last days," inaugurating a time where the one to sit on the throne of David will reign because he has been exalted to the right hand of the Father (2:17, 30-33). Peter tells the group that Jesus was delivered over to lawless men by the foreknowledge of God, but it was they who crucified him. Peter purposes his accusation to summon his hearers to a response. He uses an emphatic "you" in v. 36, likewise in the promise in v. 39 for all who turn to the Lord. He has persuaded them by shaming their character and appeals to their emotions by charging them with the bloodguilt of the Messiah (2:23).

The crowd is deeply impacted by Peter's words. They are "cut to the heart" (κατενόγησαν τὴν καρδίαν). This expression is found only here in the NT and the same is true of the verb.¹³³ It refers to a sharp pain or stab, often containing emotion.¹³⁴ The NET renders it "acutely distressed," and the NASB "pierced to the heart." The verb covers a range of emotions in the LXX: anger (Gen. 34:7), being humbled (Ps. 109:16, 108:16 LXX), and having sorrow (Gen. 27:38).¹³⁵ The "heart" here shows the depth of sincerity with which the crowd receives Peter's message.¹³⁶ The clauses are bound

¹³² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 161.

¹³³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 140.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹³⁶ Ibid. It is a distributive singular; each heart is in view.

together by the weak conjunction τε, “and so they said.” Their emotional response is evident in 2:37, “what shall we do, brothers?” (τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί;).¹³⁷ This question recalls an earlier crowd’s reaction to John the Baptist in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 3:10, 12, 14; and in various ways, Acts 3:19, 5:31, 8:22).¹³⁸ Luke often employs interruptions to speeches to help him conceal the unrealistic conciseness required by his space constraints. They are often skeleton outlines of the arguments in which he wishes to include a few points. Here the interruption (“brothers, what shall we do?”) is the full response of the crowd, thus allowing Peter to complete his speech and even provide a brief summary.¹³⁹

The crowds question of “what to do” recalls the question of the rich young ruler to Jesus (Luke 18:18).¹⁴⁰ The question concerns itself with what is required for salvation, and depending on the person, receives varied responses. One response was to have faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31). Jesus’ requirement in Luke 18 is to divest oneself from possessions and serve other’s needs. This background will supply Peter’s call with new meaning: true repentance produces a lifestyle of simplicity and care for others. Genuine faith in Jesus brings salvation (Acts 16:31) and a genuine commitment to Jesus as Lord will entail following his teaching and example.¹⁴¹ Here in Acts 2:37, the crowd is

¹³⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1-23:35* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 970.

¹³⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 141.

¹³⁹ Keener, 970-71. Schnabel, 161. Schnabel thinks it is unclear whether Peter’s listeners interrupt his speech or whether Peter had concluded his speech with the explanation of the manifestations among the followers of Jesus.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 971.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

conscience stricken over the people's corporate failure to receive their gracious God-given king, so they want to know what to do, that is, in order to be saved. This is the issue raised in 2:21; what does it mean that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved?" He summons them to repentance, similar to the prophets, and exhorts them to call upon the name of Jesus and be baptized in his name.¹⁴² "Calling upon God's name" in the Old Testament refers to calling upon Yahweh for salvation (Deut. 4:7, 2 Sam. 22:4-7, I Kings 8:52-53, Jer. 29:12, Joel 2:32). Here, Peter implies here that they should "call on" Jesus as LORD (Acts 4:12), thus identifying Jesus as part of the Godhead. Since the title "Lord" was used by Palestinian Jews to designate Yahweh, Luke implies that Jesus has risen to the status equal with Yahweh in the Old Testament.¹⁴³ This must have felt like blasphemy for the Jews. The apostles are respectfully called "brothers," a phrase previously laid down (1:16). Here is it gender specific, referring to the Twelve.¹⁴⁴

Repent and be Baptized

Peter's answer involves two exhortations and two promises. The two commands are formulated with aorist imperatives, "repent" (μετανοήσατε) and "be baptized" (βαπτισθήτω). The plural of the first imperative could involve the Jews of Jerusalem who are listening, but presumably is addressed to the whole house of Israel, not just those present (v. 36).¹⁴⁵ Peter's second imperative expects all listeners, (the singular points to

¹⁴² Ibid., 970.

¹⁴³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 81.

¹⁴⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 41.

¹⁴⁵ Schnabel, 162.

each person hearing) to let themselves be baptized, which signifies the cleansing from their guilt and sin. It is passive which means they would not be performing it themselves, but would likely be baptized by the apostles.¹⁴⁶ This makes baptism the individual response, which is representative of the response that Israel should make.¹⁴⁷ “Repent” (μετάνοια) is a fairly common word in Acts (3:19; 8:22; 17:30) and occurs mostly in the context of conversion. It is usually connected with sin and means “sorrow for and turning away from a life or act of disobedience,” but also includes the positive aspect of turning toward God (3:19).¹⁴⁸ Gentiles did not speak of moral repentance in light of religious conversion, but they simply supplemented one’s previous religious experience. The Roman practice of Polytheism was inclusive.¹⁴⁹

Peter preaches repentance like an OT prophet calling Israel to return. The prophets summoned Israel to “turn” and “return” to the Lord (Isa 55:7; Jer. 3:12; Ezek. 14:6; Hos. 14:1). Occasionally the LXX uses μετανοέω to express turning to the Lord (Jer. 8:6; 38:19; Joel 2:13). These people specifically are to repent for their crucifying the Lord, but in the larger Lukan context, repentance is appropriate for all humanity (17:30; 20:21; 26:30).¹⁵⁰ It was a call to change their lifestyle, to return to the covenant-keeping King. Here it is a call to come under the Lordship of the divinely revealed

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ C. K. Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1: 1-14*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2004), 155.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Keener, 972.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Messiah. In the New Testament μετανοέω and μετάνοια together appear 52x's.¹⁵¹ Early Judaism heavily emphasized the value of repentance and many believed that corporate repentance could hasten the judgment. Though some thought the righteous, like Abraham, needed no repentance, most acknowledged that all people have sinned and need forgiveness.¹⁵² In Luke-Acts repentance is both the content of the content of the Apostle's preaching (Acts 3:19; 5:31; 13:24) and the appropriate response (Acts 11:18). The term is barely used otherwise. Because God's Kingdom was his reign, those who were turning to embrace his reign would be embracing a new king with the condition of having no other competing allegiance. The present repentance evokes this dramatic turning of life rather than a sample of periodic penitence.¹⁵³

The second command is for "each one to be baptized" (βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν). The concept of becoming "clean" through ceremonial cleansing was not foreign to an Israelite mind. Throughout daily living, many became unclean and could not participate in the cultic life of Israel. Law-abiding Jews were required regularly and frequently to immerse themselves for purification. According to the Mishnah, Jews presenting themselves for ritual purification would enter a *miqweh*, (an immersion pool) disrobe and completely immerse themselves in the water.¹⁵⁴ This baptism in Acts 2:38 however, was larger than purification for the preparation of temple cult; it was into the name of Jesus for an unprecedented purification.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 973.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 974.

¹⁵⁴ Schnabel, 162.

The varying relations between water and Spirit baptism (here, baptism appears to precede; at 8:16 the two are not connected; at 10:44 the gift precedes baptism; and 19:5ff. baptism accompanied by the laying on of hands conveys the gift) implies that the name is anything but a magical formula.¹⁵⁵ The formulation “in the name of” (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) specifies the one on whom people call for salvation. In the LXX “in the name of” (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι), generally has the meaning “by commission of, on the authority of.” Those who are baptized “in the name of Jesus” are transferred into and under the authority of Jesus.¹⁵⁶ Luke uses varied prepositions for the expression, “baptized in Jesus’ name” (8:16, 10:48, 19:5) but was likely unconcerned with the preposition. What mattered was the name (3:6, 8:12).¹⁵⁷

Baptism occurs as the accepted initiation rite in the earliest Christian sources. Instead of assuming that this rite arose independently among John’s and Jesus’ followers, it makes sense to assume a connection by way of Jesus and to believe that it was practiced by the earliest disciples. Being baptized “in the name of Jesus” identified them through initiation into the new community and as a distinguishable sect within Judaism.¹⁵⁸ Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism and the expression “baptized in the Holy Spirit” suggests that it is an experience that John’s baptism and the Apostles’ points

¹⁵⁵ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 154.

¹⁵⁶ Schnabel, 163.

¹⁵⁷ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 155. Keener, 978.

¹⁵⁸ Keener, 976. The significance of this early evidence of baptism into Jesus name suggests that the Jesus movement used it as a line of demarcation within Judaism from an early period and represented the primary line of demarcation within Judaism, which was faith in Jesus’ exalted status. To be baptized in Jesus’ name was to affirm Jesus’ lordship.

to (Luke 3:16, Acts 2:41, 10:47).¹⁵⁹ Baptism was the way one embraced the simultaneous gift of cleansing and empowerment to share in the apostolic mission.

The debate over whether forgiveness of sins is associated with water baptism can become grammatically quite involved and is outside the purpose of this paper. I will only touch on a few points for the purposes of this chapter. The εἰς in 2:38 can mean “for the purpose of,” but Keener thinks it is likely “because of.”¹⁶⁰ Schnabel also holds to a causal sense (“forgiveness of sins is the cause of baptism”).¹⁶¹ Grammar alone will not provide us with a conclusive decision. It also cannot answer the question of whether we are dealing here only with water baptism, or if “baptism” means “identification with Christ” and water baptism. “Forgiveness” is linked more often with repentance, which is never missing when baptism and forgiveness are both mentioned. According to Keener, Luke’s conception of baptism is not disjointed from repentance but constitutes an act of repentance. Under normal circumstances one does not separate the two.¹⁶² Collins puts it most helpfully:

When Peter tells the crowd to repent and be baptized, he means that the baptism is the way of entry into the new people of God, which is the place characterized by the forgiveness of sins. That is we should not understand Peter as implying that baptism automatically conveys forgiveness in an individualistic sense, but that it ushers one into that people whose very life depends on forgiveness.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 975.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Dana and Mantey, Grammar, 104, §111.i has “for the purpose of.” Keener thinks it can mean “with a view, or resulting in.”

¹⁶¹ Schnabel, 165.

¹⁶² Keener, 975.

¹⁶³ C. John Collins, “What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part I: Exegetical Background” *Presbyterian* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 31. He continues: “It would be a modern evangelical practice to stress the word “repent” for the key condition as forgiveness, that would make sense if Peters concern were strictly and individual one, Peter would not have shared the bias of many modern evangelicals that the heart (repent) is what matters and ceremony (baptism) is not important.”

God has promised in these last days that through baptism the people of God receive the gift and enter into the newly realized eschatological condition.¹⁶⁴ Those that receive the forgiveness of sins receive the second promise in the passage, the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁵ By placing baptism between repentance and the reception of the Holy Spirit, he may intend baptism to mean “identification with Christ” in association with water as a sign. Luke has posited earlier teachings about the Spirit in terms of “gift” (δωρεάν, Lk. 11:13) and “promise” (ἐπαγγελία, Lk. 24:49, Acts 1:4).¹⁶⁶ The language of “gift” might contrast with the common early Jewish expectation that the Spirit was merited only by the most pious.¹⁶⁷ This gift has empowered Peter and the apostolic witnesses to preach in Jesus’ name in Jerusalem and will empower those who receive the same gift to spread God’s message. Referring back to Joel’s promise of the last days, it ushers in a new age in which Christ as the Davidic King will lead his people in bringing light to the Gentiles. It is difficult to determine whether Luke had in mind here a normative sequence of conversion and then receiving the gift of the Spirit. Luke’s focus with the gift is not only on empowerment for mission.¹⁶⁸ It is a sign and further means of purification. Whether or not Luke implies a temporal connection here, conversion and the Spirit are connected theologically, and it seems that the sequence may be normal

¹⁶⁴ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 154.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 155. καὶ in “and you will receive” is probably something more than a simple additive conjunction although “do this and you will receive” is a little too far in treating this as a conditional imperative. Peter is issuing a command or instruction to the question.

¹⁶⁶ Keener, 978.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 973.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 978.

rather than normative.¹⁶⁹ The genitive “of the Holy Spirit,” (τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) is epexegetical: the gift consisting of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁰

The Promise and People

God’s promise of new life through his Spirit in the last days will be a reality for them also (ὁμῶν γάρ). The personal pronoun ὁμῶν is a dative of advantage.¹⁷¹ The “promise” (ἡ ἐπαγγελία) of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49); Acts 2:33) must immediately refer to baptism in the Spirit, as it does explicitly in Acts 1:4-5. Luke connects baptism in the Spirit (1:5), being filled with the Spirit (2:4), the promise of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit, and receiving the Spirit (2:38-39).¹⁷² In the larger context of Luke’s work, “promise” also involves the eschatological inheritance of God’s people with connection of God’s covenantal commitment to Abraham and the patriarchs of Israel (Gen. 12:3, 17:21, 22:18, 26:3; Acts 7:17; 13:23).¹⁷³ It also has in view God’s unfailing covenantal love to the Davidic King (2 Sam. 7:14-15; I Chron. 17:13-14; Ps. 2:6-7, 89:26-27).¹⁷⁴ These promises are consummated in the sending of the Messiah (Acts 13:23, 32), who pours out the Spirit on his disciples (2:33). However, it would be a mistake to confine it only to the Spirit or to the promise of sending the Messiah. “It covers the covenant into which God

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 979.

¹⁷⁰ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 155.

¹⁷¹ Schnabel, 165.

¹⁷² Keener, 979.

¹⁷³ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 156.

¹⁷⁴ Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 69.

entered into with his people, to which he continues to be faithful.”¹⁷⁵ The given Spirit is fulfillment of the eternal covenant that provides a foretaste and guarantee of the eschatological future.¹⁷⁶

The promise is to you and “your children” (τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, Acts 3:20, 25-26). Τέκνον is not confined to “little child” but any person, possibly quite adult, viewed in relation to his parents. This aspect has been emphasized to argue against any notion of infant baptism in this passage. The emphasis is understandable but obscures the meaning. The most natural reading of the text is to those children present, adult and otherwise. It is the descendants of Jews who are listening to Peter.¹⁷⁷ It is also capable of covering more than one generation and distance in space introduces a further thought in the speech Luke wanted to include.¹⁷⁸ Peter may be drawing upon several instances in Genesis here for his pattern of “you and your children” (Gen. 13:15, 17:7-9).¹⁷⁹ Likely, he is using an adaptation from Deuteronomy 29:29 “the things revealed belong *to us and to our children*” (ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ἡμῶν).¹⁸⁰ In that context Moses is renewing the covenant with Israel at Moab. The Nation is present: the heads of tribes, elders, officers,

¹⁷⁵ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 155.

¹⁷⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1977), 47. “Implicit here, therefore, is the thought of the Spirit as the new covenant fulfilment of the ancient covenant promise.”

¹⁷⁷ Schnabel, 165. Keener, 981. This indicates distance in time. It remains valid for future generations of Jews, should they faithfully embrace Christ.

¹⁷⁸ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 155.

¹⁷⁹ Jean Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 82. Calvin also quickly sees here a refutation of the Anabaptists to included children of believers in baptism.

¹⁸⁰ Collins, “What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part II,” 94.

men, little ones, wives, and the sojourner, to be exhorted to remain faithful to the covenant that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob (Deut. 29:10-15). If this is true, then the things “revealed” for them and their children are in relationship to God’s faithfulness to his eternal covenant and includes the Genesis references. Those in Peter’s audience were included in the “offspring after you” and so it shall be with their offspring after them. Luke’s understanding of the Holy Spirit and fulfillment of the new covenant promises are one of continuity, not of annulment. These covenantal oaths to the families and generations of families of the Patriarchs are repeated in this promise and upheld and confirmed in the presence of the οἶκος formula found in the book of Acts.

The phrase “for all those who are far away” (πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν) is likely an echo of Isaiah 57:19 (“...peace to the far...” εἰρήνην τοῖς μακράν). In Isaiah’s context, he may be referring to Diaspora Jews returning and to Gentiles converting, a theme in his prophecies (Isa. 49:6; 55:5; 60:3). This would serve Luke’s purposes well as he shows God’s mission in Christ is expanding beyond national Israel to anyone who would respond, which would include Gentiles.¹⁸¹ Others have applied this verse to the Gentile mission (Eph. 2:17). Early Jewish interpreters applied the text to proselytes. Another use of μακράν in Acts also suggests that Gentiles are in view here (Acts 22:21, Gen. 12:2-3, 22:18). It is possible that Peter and his immediate hearers would not yet understand the allusion that Luke offers his own informed audience. Some ancients believed that individuals could speak prophetically in ways they did not understand (John 11:49-50).¹⁸² Luke shows that the gift was available to “as many as God calls,” a clear

¹⁸¹ Bock, *Acts*, 145. Keener, 981.

¹⁸² Keener, 981.

echo of the end of Joel 2:32 (3:5 LXX). In doing so he continues to clarify that salvation mediated in the new covenant is in the name of Jesus Christ. In applying biblical texts about YHWH to Jesus, he is emphasizing Jesus' deity.¹⁸³

The Οἶκος Formula

The promise of forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit continues thematically throughout the rest of Acts. Luke will show the connection of this promise in relationship to families in the presence of the "household" (οἶκος) formula.

Centuries before the New Testament was written the οἶκος word group usually referred to a place of residence or to the possessions that a deceased person left behind.¹⁸⁴

However, around the time the Septuagint was being translated, the word οἶκος came to refer to a place of residence or specifically the group of people that occupied it.¹⁸⁵

Cultural background may help shed light on the word usage, especially since some of the accounts in Acts are Gentiles who have converted to Judaism. The Greco-Roman household could include father/master, mother and children, grandparents and extended family such as uncles, aunts, cousins, and various in-laws.¹⁸⁶ The household in the biblical world was a colorful diversity of personalities and activities. Several instances in Acts evidence that God's gracious workings are not primarily individualistic, but familial. First, we will explore the passages that speak of baptism or salvation of a

¹⁸³ Ibid., 982.

¹⁸⁴ Otto Michel, "Oikos," in *TDNT*, 119-59.

¹⁸⁵ Jonathan M. Watt, "The Oikos Formula," in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 77.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 79.

“household.” Cornelius in Acts 10-11, received the Holy Spirit and was baptized along with his household. The half-proselyte Lydia was baptized with her household (16:15). Paul tells the Philippian Jailer to “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (16:31). Crispus, a synagogue ruler, believed in the Lord along with his entire household (18:8).

What was commonly understood by οἶκος is shown by Ignatius in Smyrn. 13:1 “Greetings to the families (οἶκος) of my brothers, along with their wives and children.” This refers to the father and mother of the household and children of all ages.¹⁸⁷ Considering the previous passages and people therein, it is very unlikely that these groupings contained a considerable group of slaves to which “household” or “whole household” (παῖς ὁ οἶκος) could refer.¹⁸⁸ It most naturally refers to the children in the current house, the adult children who have their own household and extended family. Where is Luke drawing upon for this use of οἶκος? In the Old Testament there are many variations of the formula “he and his (whole) house,” by which E. Stauffer concludes this “...not only referred to the children in addition to the adults but had quite *special* reference to the children, and not least to any *small children* who might be present.”¹⁸⁹ “Household” as οἶκος reflects Gen 17:27 where males in Abraham’s household followed through with God’s command to be circumcised.¹⁹⁰ God chooses Abraham in order that

¹⁸⁷ Jeremias, 20.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. This is given in view of the general sociological picture we have received of the oldest communities of the missionary church.

¹⁸⁹ Ethelbert Stauffer, ‘Zur Kindertaufe in der Urkirche’, *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* 49, no. 2 (1949): 152.

¹⁹⁰ Collins, “What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part II,” 94.

he might command his children and his “household” (οἶκος) to be faithful to the Lord (Gen. 18:19). Pharaoh gave Joseph’s brothers permission to bring their father and their “households” to Egypt (Gen 45:18). The scope of this illustrated by supplying carriages for the women and for those who could not, (no longer or not yet) walk—that is for the elderly and for children (46:7).¹⁹¹ At the time of the Passover, a lamb is to be taken for each “household” (Ex. 12:3). Rahab’s faithfulness saved her entire “household” (Josh. 2:18). Jesus heals an official’s son with his word and a day later when the father found out, “he himself believed, and all his household” (John. 4:53.)

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul uses the οἶκος formula in Corinth as early as 54 AD. These instances show the οἶκος formula was likely adopted from the Old Testament and introduced in the formal language employed in the primitive Christian church.¹⁹² Barrett notes that it is occasionally important to ask whether οἶκος could include small children, but Acts provides no explicit reference to this, either to their inclusion or exclusion.¹⁹³ Whenever the formula is used, under no circumstances could it be applied to adults only.¹⁹⁴ The point however, is not necessarily whether small children are present, but how οἶκος simply shows a pattern of the family in general. Collins agrees with Jeremias and Stauffer that the New Testament passages repeat a strongly attested pattern from the Old Testament. Perhaps the example par excellence, is the phrase “you will be saved, you and all your household” (σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ

¹⁹¹ Jeremias, 21.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 1:1-14*, 501.

¹⁹⁴ Jeremias, 22.

οἶκος σου, Acts 11:14, 16:31). The “you” in the verb inflection is singular, and is addressed to the heads of the household. By implication, the rest of the household is included. Compare this with Genesis 7:1 “go into the Ark you and all your household” (εἴσελθε σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκος σου, Deut. 14:26, 15:20). Again, the inflection is singular with the whole house included. This pattern upholds the covenantal framework of God’s work in and through representatives of households. “The household is included, not simply in the general privilege of association with covenant members, but in the specific privilege of covenant membership and therefore of covenant participation.”¹⁹⁵

Cornelius

While Peter was in Joppa, circumstances were moving towards an unprecedented stage of his missionary career. God was preparing the way for Gentiles entry in the church. A Roman centurion who feared God receives a vision that he is to arrange a meeting with Simon Peter. The next day Peter receives a vision that prepares him for this invitation by breaking down the distinction between ritually clean and unclean foods, thus leading him to reach out to Gentiles. The length of this story and its repetition indicate the great importance Luke attaches to it; the good news has come to the Gentiles.¹⁹⁶ But the description of who receives the good news along with Cornelius is important for our purpose. Cornelius is described in 10:2 as being a “devout man who feared God.” He was not a full proselyte, i.e. a Gentile who had fully accepted the Jewish religion by

¹⁹⁵ Collins, “What Does Baptism Do for Anyone? Part II,” 94.

¹⁹⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 181.

circumcision, but a “God-fearer” (cf. 13:16, 26, 16:14).¹⁹⁷ This religion wasn’t his to practice alone, but his “household” (οἶκῳ, from οἶκος). His wife and children worshiped the God of the Jews.¹⁹⁸ His household could have included slaves, as well as his own relatives (10:7).¹⁹⁹ His alms giving and prayers to God are the occasion for the vision and subsequent events.

As Peter preaches the good news, the Holy Spirit came upon “all who heard the word,” (“all who were hearing” πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας). Luke highlights God’s movement here in way reminiscent of Pentecost. Cornelius and his household are enabled by the Spirit to respond appropriately to the Gospel call. As seen in 2:38, there is a close connection with water baptism and baptism of the Spirit. Since God has brought the Gentiles into his salvation in the same way as the Jewish believers, there is no justification for the delay of baptism. “All those hearing”, i.e. Cornelius’s household (10:2), were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. In 11:1-18, certain differences arise due to the fact that now it is told from Peter’s perspective to the Jerusalem church. The order of events and the references to Pentecost show Peter as interpreting his experience as a unified version with divine purpose.²⁰⁰ In his telling, he shares an element undisclosed from the previous chapter. Cornelius tells Peter exactly what the angel said to him, “Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Schnabel, 485. Peterson, 327.

¹⁹⁹ Peterson, 327.

²⁰⁰ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts, Vol 2, The Acts of the Apostles: A Literary Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 145.

οἶκος σου, 11:13-14).²⁰¹ This the first explicit use of “save” language (σωθήση) and links this incident to Peter’s preaching at Pentecost (“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” Acts 2:21, 40, 47).²⁰² That the gospel be preached to the Gentile’s was a divine command, that they received it and along with it the promised Spirit was a divine promise (Acts 2:39, Gen. 12:3). This family of Gentiles has graciously been grafted into Abraham’s family.

At Philippi

Acts 16 is Paul’s positive response to the Macedonian vision. He arrives in Philippi, which leads to successful evangelism among the women associated with the Jewish faith. The Jewish presence seems relatively minor, evidenced by the way Lydia is introduced as a key figure among those gathered for prayer. Similar to Cornelius she is introduced with her name, profession, provenance, and devout status as a God-fearer (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν).²⁰³ Hearing what Paul had to say, the Lord “opened her heart” (διήνοιξεν τὴν καρδίαν). This expression is another way of describing her coming to faith, made clear by verse 15.²⁰⁴ The Lord opened her heart but v. 15 shows that she and her household were baptized (ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς). It is worth noting that the verb inflection here is singular with the conjunction connecting the concept that her household was and baptized also.²⁰⁵ In some cases a woman is found to own the principal dwelling left to

²⁰¹ Peterson, 345. This is an expansion of 10:22, 33 by which the outcome is indicated.

²⁰² F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody, MA: Baker Academic, 2004), 118.

²⁰³ Schnabel, 680.

²⁰⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 534. Note also the Lord’s initiative in the salvific process, a theme in Acts.

²⁰⁵ It is worth noting that the text does not specify that her family was converted but that they were baptized.

her by her deceased husband, more rarely is the husband found to reside in a house owned by his wife.²⁰⁶ Likely, she is a widow. By using οἶκος, Luke shows that all who live in Lydia's house were baptized, but since he is unspecific, it is difficult to say who this includes.

Further along in Luke's account, Paul and Silas find themselves in prison following an exorcism of a slave girl resulting in incensed owners. As they pray and sing before the other prisoners, an earthquake shakes the foundation of the prison. The door's open and everyone's bonds unfasten. The jailer awakes only to realize that the prison doors are open and immediately takes a suicidal course. The jailer is likely neither a Roman official nor Roman soldier, due to the unspecified title, but probably a public slave whom the city owned and who was responsible for securing prisoners with the help of junior slaves.²⁰⁷ Astonishingly, none of the prisoners have left, a fact that saves the jailer's life. He finds the prisoners still there and fearfully asks "what must I do to be saved?" (τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ;). They respond to his query, "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (πίστευσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκος σου).²⁰⁸ What follows confirms that the gospel of Jesus is presented to "all the people in his household" (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ), resulting in their being saved. The jailer's uncharacterized hospitality, i.e. eating with prisoners, shows that he is more concerned with Paul and Silas and their message than any

²⁰⁶ C. K. Barrett, *Acts: Volume 2: 15-28*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2004), 784.

²⁰⁷ Schnabel, 688.

²⁰⁸ Note again the subject verb agreement with sing. number, followed by the reference to the salvation of the household.

consequences he might face. He had come to faith in God, and “he rejoiced along with his entire household.”

Briefly, the last example comes from a ruler of the synagogue (ἀρχισυνάγωγος) in Corinth. In Acts 18 Paul visits the house of Titius Justus, a God-fearer who lived next door to the synagogue. His conversion account is short; “Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household” (ὅλω τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ, v. 8). The text does not actually say they were baptized, however, with the presence of the many Corinthians “hearing” (ἀκούοντες) and “being baptized” (ἐβαπτίζοντο), it is a reasonable assumption.²⁰⁹ This account is recalled in I Corinthians 1:14-16 where Paul says he baptized Crispus and Gaius and the “household of Stephanus” (τὸν Στεφανῶ οἶκον).

Whether or not these households included small children is outside the scope of this paper. However, it makes no difference. The promise of the coming Holy Spirit has been fulfilled and with it comes the eschatological sacrament of water baptism, placing the recipients into the people of God whose lives are dependent upon the forgiveness of sins. This fulfilled promise reflects Luke’s understanding of God’s faithfulness to his promises to Abraham in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. The corporate nature of the covenant evidenced in the promises to the heads of families and their lineage has not changed in the New Testament. In each instance shown in this chapter the οἶκος formula exhibits the conversion of the head of the household that carries along

²⁰⁹ Peterson, 512-13. The presence of these imperfections highlight this as a continuous pattern of response to the gospel.

with it the members of the household.²¹⁰ Family solidarity must take precedence; individual decisions were not as decisive as those of the *paterfamilias* who was responsible to speak for his family.²¹¹

That being said, even under the covenantal structure of the OT, the children who were a part of God's people through his promises and their circumcision, were still exhorted to circumcise their hearts (Deut. 10:16). Peter's call in Acts 2:38 to repent, be baptized and "call on the name of Jesus" is issued to all those who are a part of a covenantal family. The covenantal structure remains intact under Christ as does the covenantal call (i.e. "be born again," John 3:3), thus children baptized into the church are still in need of evidencing conversion through repentance and faith. This supports rather than undermines the divine promise to be "God to your offspring" (Gen. 17:7-8). The story of God's covenantal faithfulness to Israel now continues with the bringing in of Gentile families.

²¹⁰ Barrett, *Acts: Volume 2: 15-28*, 798.

²¹¹ Jeremias, 22-23.

Chapter 5: Other Reverberations

Introduction

This chapter will focus on two passages that are best interpreted and understood in light of the concept of covenantal families. The exegesis of I Corinthians 7:14 becomes strained if it is viewed through a dispensational lens; it fails to consider the concept of covenantal grace. This passage conveys some of the most astounding truths concerning mixed religious parties; God's grace through the faith of one believing spouse is enough to cleanse an entire family! This passage also broadens the notion of salvation, making room for a covenantal grace, which is not automatic, but is grace nonetheless. The exegesis of Ephesians 6:1-4 is more straightforward but still profound. This passage was chosen because it assumes the presence of children in the congregation and lays covenantal responsibilities upon them. There Paul applies quotations from the Decalogue to Gentile Christian families. In doing so, he underscores the continuity between the testaments and highlights the existence of the family as a unit under Christ.

One Believer does not a Holy Family Make

This often difficult and disputed passage is set in the context of marital instruction. It is the largest of the three subunits concerning marriage in this chapter. Paul addresses the unmarried and widows, married believers, and "the rest" (τοῖς λοιποῖς, 7:12). "The rest" are involved in a mixed marriage of a believer and unbeliever. Paul considers that Christians ought to marry other Christians ("in the Lord" 7:39), thus making it probable that this set of instructions are for those who were married prior to becoming Christians.

If 7:1b is a motto in Corinth to argue for sexual abstinence within marriage (“it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman), then in the case of a marriage between a believer and unbeliever, the Corinthians would have stronger grounds for abstinence and divorce.²¹² Paul has also told them not to have close associations with immoral people (I Cor. 5:9-11), the closest being a shared bed with a pagan.²¹³

Likely, there was much anxiety over the present situation. The believing spouse might appear to become unclean by contact with an unbelieving spouse, making the partnership unlawful.²¹⁴ Paul addresses the Christian rather than the unbelieving spouse. Here the argument constitutes the longest of the three subunits within this section. He has no “word of the Lord” (7:12) concerning the situation of a mixed marriage, therefore he develops a careful and complex argument, using his own logic in order to prove his case.²¹⁵ Paul bluntly states that a Christian wife should not divorce her unbelieving husband, and the Christian husband should not divorce his unbelieving wife (7:12-13), then develops his argument with an explanatory γὰρ in v. 14. This conjunction sets up the justification for the previous twin imperatives.²¹⁶ His aim is probably to relieve any

²¹² This is perhaps a sub-group in Corinth. The other would subscribe to a proto-Gnostic physical licentiousness.

²¹³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary On the New Testament Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 332.

²¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Tomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 148.

²¹⁵ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2006), 265.

²¹⁶ Jeremias, 45. Fee, 330.

anxiety on the part of the Christian, thus helping to maintain the marriage as a creation ordinance with the telos of saving the unbelieving partner (v. 16).²¹⁷

The reason Paul gives for the sustaining of a mixed marriage is that the believer does more to sanctify the unbeliever than the unbeliever does to defile the believer.²¹⁸

“For the husband, the unbelieving one, is sanctified in the wife, and the wife, the unbelieving one, is sanctified in the brother [husband]” (ἡγιάσται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἡγιάσται ἡ γυνὴ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ).²¹⁹ The same is true regardless of which party is believing; the Christian sanctifies the non-Christian. Sanctified “in” (ἐν) their relationship likely designates relationship with the believer rather than relationship with God through the believer.²²⁰ The argument and the language in this passage are unusual for Paul and has caused great scholarly debate. Much of this discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. The main problem seems to lie with the words “sanctified” (ἡγιάσται) and “holy” (ἁγιά), words that in Paul normally carry moral/ethical implications. It has already been used twice as a metonymy for salvation (1:30; 6:11).²²¹ But whatever it means here, it cannot carry that force. Not only because

²¹⁷ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 301. Calvin, 148.

²¹⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 148.

²¹⁹ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 267. At 14, ἀδελφός is found in some of the older majuscules (P⁴⁶, A, B, C,) but some and most minuscules read ἀνδρὶ possibly for the sake of greater balance. Various manuscripts add a “faithful” to “wife” and “husband.” These are stylistic variants and do not affect the overall sense of the text.

²²⁰ Fee, 332.

²²¹ Ibid., 331.

the salvation of a pagan partner through marriage would be ludicrous to Paul, but also because v. 16 disavows that sense completely.²²²

The verbs are both in the perfect, which usually refers to a past action (probably the baptism of the Christian or marital union of the two, 7:39) with continuing effects in the present.²²³ However, the NAS and ESV both render it in the present, likely because these tenses are a description of the unbeliever and express the current status of the marriage relationship; that it is regarded as “holy” by the Lord. Rather than showing how or when this change took place, the perfects show that the marriage is legitimate before the Lord and that is why they are best rendered “is sanctified.”²²⁴ In 14a-b Paul expresses something similar to the biblical notion of holiness by association (Ex. 29:37; Lev. 6:18; Rom 11:16).²²⁵ The notion that holiness by association rather than uncleanness by association has small biblical support prior to Jesus (Ex. 29:37; 30:29; Lev. 6:18). Perhaps Paul is drawing upon Christ’s sanctifying work and his demonstration that holiness is more powerful than impurity.

Around the time of the composition of I Corinthians, there was a Jewish marriage document that made use of the language of sanctification. In the ceremony, the groom was to say to the bride “you are made holy (as in “set apart for”) to me.” If the Corinthian’s were unfamiliar with this, there is an older covenantal formula where the

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 266. This could likely be the Christians baptism or more probably their union, cf. 7:39.

²²⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, 297. Fee, 298. This shows that the marriage has the same status before the Lord as a fully Christian marriage.

²²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 169.

words “you are a wife to me” was used in light of the wife being considered sanctified (“set apart for”) to her husband. This meant something more than she belonged to him, it also implied that she shared in her husband’s covenantal status.²²⁶ Prior to marriage a woman participated in the covenant (“was sanctified”) through her father.²²⁷ This covenantal holiness is applied to the unbeliever through the believing representative. It’s worth repeating that this holiness applied to the unbeliever is neither salvific nor does it bring moral transformation. In using the term for “save” (σώζω) in verse 16, Paul confirms that the holiness in v. 14 is not synonymous with salvation. Since this cannot be a salvific holiness, what kind of holiness could Paul be referring to? It is likely that he is claiming a covenantal holiness; the unbelieving partner is made a participant in God’s covenant people through the believing spouse, i.e. they are members of the church community. This does not imply an automatic salvation, but rather something that the unbeliever can potentially enter into by ceasing to be an unbeliever.²²⁸ Ciampa notes that they (the unbelievers) “do not benefit from the covenantal status as that can only be hoped for as the marriage unfolds (7:16).”²²⁹ Yet they (the married couple) are one flesh (Gen. 2:24) and share together with God’s holy people.

Rather than show how this sanctification has come to be, Paul simply sets forth the proof of his assertion by including the status of the offspring in this union. His

²²⁶ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 266.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 267.

²²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, 298. I agree that there are no benefits salvifically, however there are benefits to being in a covenantal family that will be explored further in the chapter. What’s important here is that he assumes a covenantal status.

argument is thus: “otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy” (ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἁγία ἐστιν).²³⁰ He shows the contrast of his position over the Corinthians: “otherwise” (from your position), your children are unclean, but now (from my position) they are holy.²³¹ The reasoning is *a fortiori*, “if you grant that your children are made clean, though their father (or mother) is an unbeliever, you can continue in your marriage without anxiety. Just as they are clean, so is your spouse.”²³² No one can say the children of a mixed marriage are impure. When ἁγία is used of people it means “to include a person in the inner circle of what is holy, in both cultic and moral association of the word, consecrate, dedicate, sanctify.”²³³ The children of a mixed marriage, through their relationship to the believing parent, are participants in the covenant people of God.²³⁴

The contrast with “holy” is “unclean” (ἀκάθαρτά). This is a word that occurs in Paul only in a quotation of Isa 52:11 (2 Cor. 6:17).²³⁵ There he quotes Leviticus 26:12 and Isaiah 52:11 consecutively, underscoring that “unclean,” at least in 2 Cor. 2:17, belongs to the language of the sacrificial system. This can help shed light on the passage under consideration (1 Cor. 7:14). Paul is speaking in the cultic realm where the language of “clean” and “unclean” characterized the status of a worshipper before God.²³⁶ It

²³⁰ The conjunction is used inferentially instead of causally, thus “otherwise.”

²³¹ Fee, 333.

²³² Jeremias, 44. Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 149.

²³³ BDAG, s.v. “ἁγία”.

²³⁴ They still need to embrace God’s promise from the heart.

²³⁵ Collins, *First Corinthians*, 271.

²³⁶ Ibid., 267.

regarded their proper orientation to God by way of the prescribed sacrifice. This shows that the “children of believers are set apart from others by a certain special privilege, so that they are regarded as holy in the Church.”²³⁷ Through the covenantal relationship of marriage the unbelieving spouse has been brought into the sphere of Christian community. From an OT perspective, the implications of being “set apart” means those who are sanctified have “full access to the temple constituted by the sanctified community.”²³⁸ Here in this passage it suggests that the unbelieving spouse is included in the inner circle consisting of those who have full access to the church’s fellowship and teaching, along with the sanctified community.²³⁹ In both cases (the unbelieving spouse and children) Paul is setting forth a high view of God’s grace at work through the believer toward the members of their household.²⁴⁰ How are these things possible? Calvin reasons that they are a continuation of the eternal covenant of grace, the same covenant with the seed of Abraham is now extended to us.²⁴¹

This passage is one of the most astounding truths about a covenantal family in light of Christian marriage; one believing member sanctifies, i.e. “sets apart for God’s purposes,” the whole household.²⁴² The idea of a “holy family” takes up Jewish ritual

²³⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 149.

²³⁸ Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, “Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, the Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of the Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 729.

²³⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, 300. Both “holiness” and uncleanness” are scriptural terms well known in STJ for their importance with respect to God’s temple. Here the “temple” (church) is to welcome the unbelieving spouse into fellowship.

²⁴⁰ Fee, 333.

²⁴¹ Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 149.

²⁴² Jeremiah, 44.

language and rest securely on the presupposition of family solidarity. God's loving concern extends to the whole family (Gen. 6:18; Deut. 30:19; Ps. 78:1-7). This solidarity or interrelatedness is likely at the heart of the transferability of the holiness of God's people, hinging on the two becoming one flesh and God's blessing of marriage.²⁴³ This is a relief and encouragement for the believing spouse and an exhortation to the community of faith. This family is to be embraced the same way a family of believers would be in the church. Prayers that the unbelieving parties would cease in their unbelief should also be offered up. This brings great blessing upon its recipients that otherwise would be lost to such families.²⁴⁴ It also places the unbeliever in a position to experience a greater witness of the Gospel than they would have if their marriage was not allowed to continue (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-4). The lifestyle of a believing spouse creates a sacred environment where the other receives a Christian influence of God's holiness and transforming power, with an aim to their future salvation. As long as the marriage is maintained, the prospect for the spouse's real salvation remains.²⁴⁵

Responsibilities of Covenantal Families

We now look to another Pauline letter that highlights the obligations of being a part of the covenant community. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1-4 into a different family situation. Here it is assumed that those being addressed, wives/children/husbands, are believers in Christ. The aim of this next section is to show that what is known as the *Haustafel*,

²⁴³ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 289.

²⁴⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, 302.

²⁴⁵ Fee, 333.

which find their presence in Colossians and Ephesians, highlight the responsibilities of covenantal families.²⁴⁶

Several theories for the origin of the codes in the NT have been put forth.²⁴⁷ Martin Dibelius argued that the Codes came from a Stoic background. E. Lohmeyer argued for a Jewish background and others held that they were of a Christian origin (K. H. Rengstorf).²⁴⁸ One of the more recent and convincing arguments is that Plato and Aristotle, in *Economics*, laid out tasks related to the management of a household as a part of their discussion of the state.²⁴⁹ Aristotle shows the οἶκος to be the most important kernel of the state and is known to have influenced the realm of economics up until the time of the NT.²⁵⁰ The Aristotelian influence is significant because it shows two key characteristics carried forth in Ephesians, the three part structure and the reciprocal relationship in which both pairs are mentioned.²⁵¹ However, there are no exact parallels for the NT Codes as we have them. The economic literature may have served as a background and Paul may have borrowed the architecture, but they are likely a distinctly new genre in that they are concise and all the members are addressed.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Timothy G. Gombis, "A Radically New Humanity: The Function of the Haustafel in Ephesians," *JETS* 48, no. 2 (June, 2005): 317. The German term Haustafel ("house table") was first used by Martin Luther and is a commonality used with reference to the household codes in the NT.

²⁴⁷ Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 168.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* To quote Aristotle in Book One of his *Politics* (Pol. I.3. 1253b): "Now that it is clear from what parts the state is composed, it is essential to speak of household-management first...and the first and smallest parts of a household are: master and slave, husband and wife, father and children...".

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 169.

Even further, they are Codes written in light of recent eschatological events, namely the death and resurrection of Christ and the birth of the Church. In a society where a religion that attracted women and slaves would be viewed as suspicious and potentially undermining to the moral fabric of society, Paul adopts the form of the Codes but adds new content.²⁵³ For the sake of brevity, I will pass over the commandments to wives/husbands and slaves/masters and will focus on the child/parent relationship in Ephesians 6:1-4. The Codes in their structure do not explicitly mention the idea of a covenantal family, but the content (“Lord” in vv.1 and 4, the quotation of the fifth commandment from the LXX) underscores that Paul is drawing on the OT concept of family and applying it to the church.

In this passage Paul gives two imperatives, one for the children (v.1) and one for fathers (v. 4), then follows with appropriate motivational clauses. In vv. 2-3 he quotes almost verbatim from the LXX as a motivation for the obedience of children and parenthetically draws attention to the promise of a satisfying life. Paul addresses the children first (τὰ τέκνα), as is consistent with addressing the weaker (“vulnerable”) party first in the *Haustafel* (wives/children/slaves).²⁵⁴ That children should obey their parents is evident throughout antiquity, however especially in light of God’s promise to be the God of believers’ seed, it is a non-negotiable for the covenant people (Gen. 18:19; Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). By raising children to be faithful to the Lord, the mission of God flourishes.

²⁵³ Craig Keener, “Family and Household,” *DNTB*, 353. Gombis, 317.

²⁵⁴ “Weak” is meant in the sense of “position of vulnerability” in the house.

In the Greco-Roman world the duties of children to parents included love, honor, providing for them in old age, burying them, and venerating them after death.²⁵⁵ These were at the core of Roman ideal family relations, which would hold their society together.²⁵⁶ Hellenistic Jewish literature takes a similar approach; children were expected to provide for elderly parents, see to their burial, and honor them next only to God.²⁵⁷ Here Paul commands them to “obey...in the Lord” (ὕπακούετε...[ἐν κυρίῳ]). Instead of the passive form “submit,” which softens the force of the command to the wives (5:22, ὑποτάσσω) and implies a voluntary element, the verb ὑπακούω is active and expresses the unquestioning compliance of children toward their parents.²⁵⁸ The Pentateuch warns of a stubborn and rebellious son who does not “obey” (ὕπακούων) his father and mother (Deut. 21:18). The obedience of Christian children is “in the Lord,” which is virtually synonymous with “as to the Lord” or “as to Christ” (5:22, 6:5). The phrase “in the Lord” is missing from several important manuscripts in the Alexandrian and Western traditions, however, the evidence for the longer reading is early, widespread, and strong (Col. 3:20).²⁵⁹ The phrase “for it is right” (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον) could be the first motivation listed for the obedience of the children.²⁶⁰ Recently however, it has been

²⁵⁵ Balla, 64-68.

²⁵⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 396.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 415.

²⁵⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 441. Thielman, 397. The longer reading is found in P⁴⁶, A, D¹, 33, 1739, 1881, vg, sy, co, and the majority text.

²⁶⁰ Introduced with γάρ.

thought to link to the Old Testament quotation in v. 2, showing that “it is right and what is demanded by the law.”²⁶¹ This means the clause “for this is right” could be functioning as introduction for the commandment, rather than a separate reason for the exhortation.²⁶² The children, who are full members of the worshipping congregation and by implication are present, have covenantal responsibilities to their covenant Lord.²⁶³

Paul follows the first imperative with another, quoting from the LXX (Ex. 20:12), “honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise).”²⁶⁴ This is the fifth commandment in the Decalogue and finds importance elsewhere in the OT (Ex. 21:15, Lev. 19:3, Deut. 21:18-21). To “honor” (τίμα) one’s parents in the Old Testament is parallel to “fearing one’s mother and father” (Lev. 19:3). For small children they are to obey their parent’s instructions and for adult children they are to respect and take care of their parents in old age.²⁶⁵ Paul’s statement that “this is the first commandment with a promise” (ἡτις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ) has puzzled many interpreters.²⁶⁶ The commandment to honor one’s parents finds occasion in five other places in the New Testament, but only here is the attached promise cited.²⁶⁷ The

²⁶¹ Obrien, 442.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 261.

²⁶⁴ Obrien, 442. The language is closer to Ex. 20:12 rather than Deut. 5:16, though the MT of this verse omits the clause “that it may go well with you” (Eph. 6:3).

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Thielman, 399. Some have tried to solve this in a variety of ways. Several arguments show that “first” carries a meaning other than its usual one of sequence. This is against the most natural reading. Others have organized the Decalogue into two parts; one for duties to God, the other for duties toward human beings. There is no clear evidence that first-century Jews practiced this. The most obvious meaning in the context is probably correct.

²⁶⁷ Obrien, 443. Cf. Matt. 15:4, 19:19; Mark 7:10, 10:19; Luke 18:20.

statement attached to the second commandment in the Decalogue, which reads that God will punish those who hate him and show mercy to those who keep his commands is more of a description of Yahweh's character than a promise.²⁶⁸ The best explanation is that Paul is thinking of the commands that God gave Israel on Sinai, not of any that precede the Mosaic Law. This shows that the writer views the "Decalogue as but the beginning of the many commandments contained in the Torah."²⁶⁹ This makes it the first commandment with a promise specifically attached to it.²⁷⁰

When Paul reapplies this commandment to Christian readers he shows that the promise has two parts, "that is may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔσῃ μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). The promise of prosperity is absent from the MT of Exod. 20:12, but is identical to the LXX reading of Exod. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16.²⁷¹ Just as in the Old Testament children who honored their parents were blessed with a full life, so also in the age of the new covenant Christian children are under the same obligation and guarantee. The future indicative ἔσῃ with ἵνα is uncharacteristic but there is a precedent for this elsewhere within Paul (Gal. 2:4; I Cor. 9:18).²⁷² Paul replaces the clause "which the Lord your God gives you" (LXX Ex. 20:12) with simply "upon the earth" (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). By omitting the reference to the land for Israel, he "universalizes" the promise, adapting it to include Gentile families under

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 404.

²⁷⁰ O'Brien, 399.

²⁷¹ Thielman, 400.

²⁷² Ibid.

Christ. Rather than spiritualizing μακροχρόνιος and interpreting it to mean immortality, it is best understood to mean a “long time on the earth.”²⁷³ Exceptions to the rule do not nullify the promise; every believing child who obeys one’s parents can entrust themselves to God’s word. In applying Old Testament commands and promises to Gentile Christian families Paul underscores the concept of a covenantal family.

Consistent with his pattern in the Household Code, Paul here personally addresses the Fathers with specific responsibilities in their parenting. Wives/children/slaves form three separate parties and represent the more vulnerable status in the Codes, but the *paterfamilia* is weighted with the duties of husband/father/master.²⁷⁴ That children would be addressed at all is extraordinary since they are not addressed in the Aristotelian tradition.²⁷⁵ Paul joins the command to the fathers with the obligations of children (vv.1-3) by way of the adjunctive conjunction “also” (καὶ) stressing the mutuality of the relationship between children and parents.²⁷⁶ In the same way that Christian children have a covenantal responsibility to obey their parents, fathers are to use their authority for the good of their children.

Fathers (οἱ πατέρες) are commanded by way of prohibition not to provoke their children to anger or wrath. Paul uses a volitional clause with a present imperative (μὴ

²⁷³ Schnackenburg, 262. Obrien, 444. Philo and Jerome spiritualized this phrase. If the apostle had wanted to reference eternal life he could have omitted the phrase “upon the earth” as he did with the previous phrase from Ex. 20:12.

²⁷⁴ Obrien, 445.

²⁷⁵ Gombis, 328. The fathers are addressed concerning how to govern their relationships, but now Paul honors the “weaker” party and lays Christian responsibility before them.

²⁷⁶ Wallace, 671. Thielman, 401.

παροργίζετε) to show that this is a general precept laid down for fathers.²⁷⁷ This is likely due to the potential for the abuse of power. Paul employs the verb παροργίζω, which is used elsewhere only once in the NT in relation to God making Israel angry due to persistent disobedience.²⁷⁸ Just as the Christian community is to take care when anger arises (Eph. 4:26-27, 31), Christian fathers are to see to it that they don't arouse this in their children. This command is broad enough to encompass 'excessively severe discipline, unreasonably harsh demands, abuse of authority, arbitrariness, unfairness, constant nagging and condemnation, subjecting a child to humiliation, and all forms of gross insensitivity to a child's needs and sensibilities.'²⁷⁹ This takes into consideration the child's bent and personality and invokes their personhood that is deserving of respect in its own right and is not to be manipulated, exploited, or crushed. Paul uses τὰ τέκνα (neuter pl.) enveloping multiple children and both genders. He is not concerned with the ages of the children, but rather has the relationship in view; a relationship that is graciously established and nourished by God's covenantal promise (Deut. 30:19-20; Eph. 4:4-5).²⁸⁰

Paul follows the prohibition with a command using the adversative conjunction, (ἀλλὰ) denoting a strong contrast from negative to positive.²⁸¹ Fathers are now exhorted

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 486, 725. The present imperative has been argued in certain contexts to mean something like "stop doing this," rather than "do not start this." This is possible, but doesn't seem likely due to the fact that a general precept in the form of present prohibition does not indicate whether the action is ongoing or not.

²⁷⁸ See Romans 10:19 where used in relation to God making Israel angry.

²⁷⁹ Lincoln, 406.

²⁸⁰ Thielman, 401.

²⁸¹ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 796.

to “nurture” or “bring up” their children. The present imperative of “bring up” (ἐκτρέφετε) is used here and in Eph 5:29.²⁸² It can mean “to feed or nourish, to provide food for the body.” Here it carries the meaning of “to bring up from childhood, rear up, nurture.”²⁸³ In the LXX this term is used frequently to refer to the rearing of children (1 Kings 11:20, 12:8-10, Isa. 23:4, Hos. 9:12). This not only included providing for the physical needs of the child, but also showing them physical affection (2 Sam. 12:13 LXX) and most importantly instructing them in the law of God (Deut. 6:6-7, 11:18-19).²⁸⁴ The following prepositional phrase carry two datives of manner and characterizes the nature of instruction.

Παιδεία can mean “training, discipline and instruction” and is mainly concerned with the act of providing guidance for responsible living.²⁸⁵ In the LXX it was used of the training of children through frequent correction or punishment.²⁸⁶ In context with “admonition” (νουθεσία), παιδεία likely has the general sense of “instruction” in view.²⁸⁷ “Admonish” (νουθεσία) generally describes “counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper cause of conduct.”²⁸⁸ Several translations render this “instruction” (RSV,

²⁸² Wallace, 485, 722. Rather than conveying an ongoing process, the present tense here is aimed at a habit that should characterize the father’s behavior by way of repetition.

²⁸³ Hoehner, 796.

²⁸⁴ Thielman, 401.

²⁸⁵ BDAG, s.v. “παιδεία”.

²⁸⁶ Lincoln, 407.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ BDAG, s.v. “νουθεσία”.

NASB, ESV), but “admonition” (AV, RV) better conveys the nuance of warning.²⁸⁹

While admonishment can surely take place through encouragement, it usually implies that there is a difficulty or attitude in the behavior of those being addressed that needs to be corrected.²⁹⁰ Christian fathers are not to be lax in their method of parenting. To spare a child of wisdom and warning is to desire his destruction (Prov. 13:24).

The last phrase “of the Lord” (κυρίου), specifically the “Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20), is the most significant portion in the verse. “The Lord” encapsulates this short passage and is what sets the Household Codes in Ephesians (absent in Colossians 3:21, but see 3:18, 20 and 22) apart from Graeco-Roman and Jewish writings.²⁹¹ This is the new component of the new covenant. It is possible to see this genitive as subjective, communicating the idea that it is the Lord who stands behind and through all fatherly instruction concerning himself. This would align with the phrase “discipline of the Lord” in the LXX (Prov. 3:11).²⁹² This is a viable option and theologically sound, but if παιδεία is to be understood more broadly as “instruction,” it is more fitting that this is a genitive of quality, denoting instruction and warning in the Christian faith with the Lord as its reference point.²⁹³ This also serves as a guardrail for the fathers, making them subordinate to a higher authority in person and principle, namely the Lordship of Christ.

²⁸⁹ Hoehner, 798.

²⁹⁰ Schnackenburg, 263. He notes that this second way is a more lenient way and is more appropriate for dealing with older children.

²⁹¹ Suzanne Watts Henderson, “Taking Liberties with the Text: The Colossians Household Code as Hermeneutical Paradigm,” *Interpretation* 60, no. 4 (October 2006): 422. She argues that this different impetus of the Lordship of Christ should not be taken lightly.

²⁹² Lincoln, 408.

²⁹³ Wallace, 86.

The aim of faithful parenting in the covenant family is that through godly training and correction their children will grow up in faithfulness to Christ, embracing the instruction of their parents to come under submission to the covenant Lord.

These passages not only provide application for the church but are confirm the pattern laid down in the eternal covenant to Abraham. The believing spouse in Corinth is free from anxiety in the marriage because God graciously makes the unbelieving spouse covenantally clean. The relationship can be maintained, knowing that union is blessed by the Lord, with the hope of the salvation of the unbeliever. The church is to embrace this whole family as members of the visible people of faith, caring for and nourishing them as they would any other family in the church. Believing parents are to bring up their children in the instruction and admonitions that is fitting under the Lordship of Christ. Their faithful parenting fosters faithfulness in their children; the faithfulness that is exhorted to embrace Christ from the heart. This is evidenced in obedience to the parental authority. These families, when seeking to embody this truth, uphold and operate under the covenantal structure founded in Abraham and sustained in Christ.

Conclusion

The aim of this work was to show the covenantal pattern between God and families that began in Abraham and continued in Christ. This structure presupposes unity between the testaments. The Bible was intended to be read and studied as a whole. To regard the New Testament as a stand-alone document is to truncate God's redemptive story and undermine the cohesiveness of the Scriptures. Abraham was promised that he and his family would be the vehicle of God's blessing to all humanity. This was signified in circumcision. The New Testament authors portray Christ as a fulfillment and expansion of God's covenant to Abraham; God's saving grace extends more fully to the gentiles.

Christ's compassion for the little children in the Gospels show his unique tenderness toward a social class that has nothing to offer save their neediness and dependency. These Jewish children were heirs of the Abrahamic promises, Jews by birth and God's chosen people. The children were properly received by Christ because they belonged to him. Peter drew upon Old Testament references in his Pentecost speech to show that the promised Holy Spirit, the one who would bring cleansing and forgiveness through the atonement of Christ, was for those families who were present along with their successive generations. This finds implicit evidence in the *oikos* formula throughout the rest of the book of Acts, where whole families are baptized into the Christian faith. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians upholds covenantal grace by showing that one believer cleanses an unbelieving spouse and children. This family is now in the sphere of God's

visible people through the one believer. Once the family is placed graciously in the realm of God's people, covenantal responsibilities are laid upon them. When parents gently and lovingly instruct children and children respond well by obeying these instructions, the covenantal family exhibits God's relationship with his people.

Maintaining a covenantal framework through which to view Scripture upholds the integrity of the unity of the Bible. The New Testament grows from and continues what God began in the Old. Otherwise, the continuity between the testaments becomes broken and the metanarrative of God's redemptive history becomes piece-meal; a smorgasbord of proof-texts that fails to consider the larger hermeneutic. Combined with the influence of North American values influencing interpretation, this individuates God's salvific purposes and undermines his covenantal grace. Practically speaking, the community of faith at large is unclear on a theology of the family. At worst, the church's children are viewed and treated as heathen, at best the family fashions a glorious inconsistency in their orthopraxy; they nourish their children in covenantal grace, i.e. they are taught to love, worship and serve God, but cannot support this theologically. What is needed is a reclaimed view of the family in the covenant, to view the family as a community within the divine community. The eternal God who does not lie has promised believers across the span of time to be their God and the God of their children. May we rest and trust in his gracious promise.

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