

# The Holy Spirit's Role in Assurance of Salvation

*Dr. Joel R. Beeke*

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:1–17

Text: Romans 8:12–17

If we are true believers, the Holy Spirit's role in our personal assurance of faith can scarcely be stressed sufficiently. Without the Spirit, we will either be kept from having assurance when we should have it, or we will think we have it, when we have no right to it. Only through the Spirit's work can we be assured that we are true Christians.

Because we are weak and in constant need of divine assistance, the Holy Spirit works assurance in us on behalf of the Godhead. Romans 8:16 makes plain that this is the special work of the Holy Spirit when it says literally in Greek, "*Himself*, that is, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." The Greek sentence in verse 16 begins with the pronoun *Himself*, giving emphasis to this divine work of assurance that we are the children of God by the Spirit upon and with our human consciousness.

In this sermon, with God's help, we will look briefly at the Spirit's capability to do this great work of assurance, and second, more largely, at the Spirit's evidences of doing this work as expounded by Paul in Romans 8:12–17.

### **Evidences of the Ability of the Spirit in Relation to Assurance**

As God, the Holy Spirit is able to do this work. In His wisdom, He knows precisely what we need to comfort, encourage, and assure us. His power overcomes every barrier raised against assurance. His energy never varies or fades, so that even in the most demanding times in life, the Spirit testifies of our adoption.

In the divine economy, particular responsibilities rest upon particular persons. It is not that there is no sharing in most of these areas but there is special responsibility and involvement by one divine person in particular. This is especially true of the Holy Spirit in relation to assurance. As our Lord prepared His disciples for His death, resurrection, and ascension, He told them that the divine Comforter would come in His place: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless [or orphaned]: I will come to you” (John 14:16–18). The despair of the disciples after the resurrection vanished with the coming of the Spirit in His mighty, indwelling power. His presence assures believers through the darkest times that we are not left as orphans!

This peculiar work of the Spirit is evident in the way that He affirms sonship or adoption. Galatians 4:4–7 parallels and amplifies Romans 8:16: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (vv. 4–5). Here the work of redemption through Christ goes beyond the forensic language to the familial reality, “the adoption of sons.” But how do we know that

we are adopted by God? Galatians 4:6 goes on to say, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Do you see the direct connection? The Father does not want us to live in suspense about whether we are truly children of God. That reality is affirmed by the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our own hearts, so that He urges forth the cry, “Abba! Father!”

### **Evidences of the Witness of the Spirit in Relation to Assurance**

The entire paragraph of Romans 8:12–17 presents a tapestry explaining the assuring witness of the Spirit. Paul sets before us six major strands in this tapestry, all of which work together for those of us who are believers so that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.

*First, the Spirit's work in developing a sense of “ought-ness” within us (v. 12).*

The Holy Spirit affects our desires or works in us a sense of holy “ought-ness.” That ought-ness means, as Paul says in verse 12, that we feel indebted “not to the flesh, to live after [or according to] the flesh.” Paul is saying, “There is a certain revulsion for the things of the flesh that is highlighted and amplified by the conjoining work of the Spirit upon our spirits.” When the Spirit sheds His own light on this holy ought-ness to live in accord with the Spirit and a holy revulsion against sin, so that we understand that He has worked within us the marks of grace, such as loving righteousness and hating the works of the flesh—which entails hating all sin since all sin is after the flesh—we may know that we are children of God.

That Spirit's work of witnessing “ought-ness” within us includes many other positive things as well:

- He bears witness to our spirit and mind that the whole of the Bible is true and illuminates the Scriptures for us, so that we readily believe the entire Word of God is authoritative for our faith and practice.
- He makes clear for us how we are to live, so that we learn to love God's law and run to obey all His commandments and seek to overcome evil with good.
- He cures us of our spirit of self-dependence in a large measure by giving us clear sights of Christ in His beauty and fullness, showing us that He is our all-in-all, which in turn makes sin exceedingly sinful and odious.
- He works within us a tender and respectful love for each person of the Trinity, and gives us a burning passion for fellowship and a deeper experiential knowledge and enjoyment of each divine person.
- He moves us to long to be filled with the Spirit so that we yearn to surrender to Him complete control of our entire lives and long to please God in the pursuit of gospel holiness and service.
- He stirs our souls and affections so that our hearts burn within us, enabling us to know His witnessing work of imparting Christ-centered peace and Spirit-endowed quietness in our souls.
- He provides liberty in intercessory prayer for our fellow believers and moves us to love them and commune with them about God and His wonderful truth, thereby delivering us from solitary religion. We learn by His witnessing work that we can't be loners, for if we have God as our Father, Christ as our elder brother, and the Spirit as our sanctifier, we will also have the church as our mother and fellow believers as our brothers and sisters.

- He causes us to know experientially some foretaste of the blessedness of heaven, which Paul calls “the firstfruits of the Spirit”—the beginnings of the full crop or perfection of glory (Rom. 8:23). He moves us to long to be in glory and shows us that we truly belong there, for where our Savior dwells is our real home.

*Second, the Spirit's help in mortifying the deeds of the body (v. 13).*

The Spirit uses this ought-ness, this not living after the flesh, to lead us to mortify or put to death the deeds of the flesh. Paul goes on to say in verse 13, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Paul does not hesitate to identify the child of God as one who “through the Spirit” puts to death “the deeds of the body.” John Owen explained what Paul means by “deeds of the body”: “*The body*, then, here is taken for that corruption and depravity of our natures whereof the body, in a great part, is the seat and instrument, the very members of the body being made servants unto unrighteousness thereby.... It is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust, that is intended.”<sup>1</sup>

But why does Paul use such strong language as putting to death the deeds of the body? Again, Owen explained, “To kill a man, or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigour, and power, so that he cannot act or exert, or put forth any proper actions of his own; so it is in this case.”<sup>2</sup> The work of Christ in His death on the cross laid the deathblow to the deeds of the body, but that work is applied in degrees throughout our lives as those in union with Him. “Be killing sin or it will

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1. Owen, *Works*, 6:7.

2. Owen, *Works*, 6:8.

be killing you,” wrote Owen, and then added: “The vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.”<sup>3</sup> Chiefly involved in this work, therefore, is the Holy Spirit, for it is only “by the Spirit,” as He strengthens us and brings to our aid the graces God has provided, that we have any success in mortifying the deeds of the flesh. In that process, the Holy Spirit engages our conscious minds and breathes affirmation that we are children of God.

So it is “through the Spirit,” Paul tells us, that we recognize our mortification as a genuine work and thus confirm our sonship. Here is the difference between those ascetics and mystics that by sheer strength of will and punishment of their bodies live in isolation from everyone else to mortify the flesh, and the child of God who lives in the world but is not of the world. The Spirit comes to the believer’s aid so that he might be salt and light in the world about him while not loving the world or the things in the world. The Spirit does this by (1) making us alert to sin, to patterns of disobedience, to areas lacking discipline, to enslaving attitudes, to creeping strangleholds of pride. He alerts and exposes these areas, which leads us to (2) grief over our sin. Our grief over our sin affects us so that sin becomes odious to us. We become burdened about our areas of disobedience. (3) Then the Holy Spirit takes us back to the gospel, applying the sin-killing work of Christ at the cross, showing us that we are free from the bondage of whatever sins beset us. (4) He enables us to fight the good fight of faith, to put on the whole armor of God to resist the onslaught of the adversary. (5) And then, by His strength co-laboring with our fighting, He enables us to put the sword through sin. As this happens,

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3. Owen, *Works*, 6:9.

the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

*Third, the Spirit's leadership in living as a Christian (v. 14).*

Continuing in this same vein of thought, Paul declares in verse 14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *they* [emphatic in the Greek] are the sons of God." This leading is an ongoing activity demonstrated by the present tense and passive voice verb. It is the same verb used in Galatians 5:18, "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."

The Spirit's leading is one of the most important evidences of being a child of God. "These words" of Romans 8:14, wrote B. B. Warfield, "constitute the classical passage in the New Testament on the great subject of the leading of the Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

What does this phrase "led by the Spirit of God" mean? Few subjects are so intimately related to the Christian life as "the leading of the Spirit," and few have adequate conceptions of what that means. Some ignore the subject altogether because it's enshrouded in mystery, whereas others speak of it lightly and glibly and always feel they are being led by the Spirit. Some think the very expression "leading of the Spirit" smacks of fanaticism, whereas other dear children of God shy away from it and thus from their privileges as well.

The leading of the Spirit refers to that office of the third person of the Trinity by which He guides all believers—not just peculiarly eminent saints—through the wilderness of this life to glory. This leading is not the Spirit's first work in the hearts and lives of sinners. His

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4. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Power of God unto Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930), 151.

first task is to bring them to new life. Before He leads us, He must regenerate us; He must quicken us.

But the Holy Spirit does not leave the newborn believer there; He not only regenerates and quickens the sinner, but from that moment on directs and leads his life so that he will begin to and increasingly live in harmony with that new nature implanted in him. The Holy Spirit works in us, the apostle says, both to will and to do in accord with God's own pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Based on the Word of God, the Holy Spirit directs our actions by enlightening our understanding and guiding our inclinations to do what is pleasing to God. This work of leading is essential for the well-being of the life of faith; if you are not led by the Spirit, you cannot be a child of God.

The work of the Spirit in leading consists of *illuminating* and *directing*. Both of these are necessary. We need the Spirit both to enlighten our minds to inform us of our duty as well as to enable us to walk in obedience to God's precepts. The metaphor of leading is taken from the blind and the weak. A blind man who cannot see needs someone to take him by the hand, to guide him, to lead him. A lame person cannot walk in the way, and he too needs someone to support him. Those two things are combined in this office of the Holy Spirit. He guides and supports God's people. He enlightens their minds but He also enables them to walk in the way that leads to heaven.

Eric Moerdyk explains this well:

Do you see the beauty of this work of the Holy Spirit? Do you see how when God gives you spiritual life, He activates you? When someone leads you by the hand, you still must move your feet and walk along. You are still responsible; you still must act. But you act following the leading of another! This is the leading of the Spirit. He does not force you to obey God, but comes with sweet power to lead you. And when you resist His leading, that is sin. That is like trying to drive your car with

the emergency brake still activated. There is this inner resistance and unhappiness about where you are going, and a tug to slow you down and make you realize, something is wrong. I don't belong here, I should not do this. This is what it means to be led by the Spirit of God.<sup>5</sup>

The Holy Spirit leads and guides us in God's ways, always in concert with *His Word*. God's Word is the standard by which we must regulate our lives. As David says, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). The Bible is our map that we must consult on the road to heaven. This includes the Spirit's more direct influences upon our minds and hearts, all of which are also Bible-based. The Spirit will always work in harmony with His Word.

Based on God's Word, the Spirit sometimes speaks to His people in an intimate, direct way. If you are a believer, you know what I mean. Sometimes the Spirit influences your mind by *biblical applications* that restrain you from going into the ways of sin and encourage you to go in the ways of holiness. For example, when we are tempted to commit a sin, the Spirit will strive with us so that we feel that we must not yield to this temptation because it is dangerous for us and is dishonoring to God. The Spirit leads us to fight against our lusts.

When God's children are not backsliding, they are being led by the Spirit who is constantly forming Christ in us, as Paul expresses to the Galatians (Gal. 4:19). Through the application of His Word, the Holy Spirit directs us in the way of holiness. The Holy Spirit never leaves us stagnant but affirms our adoption as God's children even in the middle of the spiritual conflicts that arouse the graces He has implanted in our hearts. In the

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5. Eric Moerdyk, sermon no. 41 on Canons of Dort, Head V, art. 10 (part 5)—see [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com).

process of exercising those graces in the Christian walk, as the believer is led by the Holy Spirit in pursuit of conformity to Christ, the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

*Fourth, the Spirit's impartation of the sonship of adoption (v. 15).*

In verse 15, we find the consciousness that we belong to the Lord by way of a contrast, as Paul speaks of having received something as opposed to what we have not received: “ye have received the Spirit of adoption” and not “the spirit of bondage,” or slavery that leads “again to fear.” Paul here helps us in understanding the precise character of the Spirit given to us in Christ. He is not the Spirit of bondage. He doesn't keep us in indefinite bondage to the law or lead us back to where we started out. There's a necessary connection between the Spirit given to us and the knowledge of our own sonship in Christ, since He is categorically the Spirit of adoption.

This Spirit of adoption, therefore, is not something additional or optional, but it is something essential to the well-being of the Christian life. The Christian life, when properly lived, is life in the Spirit—the Spirit of adoption—the Spirit that will not disown the sons of God. Nor does that Spirit want the sons of God to disown their own sonship!

I have only one son. I care a great deal about how I treat him because he is my son. I am more patient with him and persevere more with him than with other young men because he is my son!

The fact that we are sons of God, dear believers, determines the Father's attitude toward us and should determine our attitude toward the Father. A son is not dispensable. A son is not hired help who can be fired. A

father can't and won't just send his son away. A son is not a dog eating crumbs under his table.

There is a new liberty in sonship that belongs to the Christian—a liberty that affects every area of life. Sonship is affirmed as the liberty that is exercised in worship, in prayer, in embracing God's promises, and in embracing God as a personal Father. Paul demonstrates this in the text, saying, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Michael Barrett explains the commonly misunderstood term *abba* well:

The *ab* part of the word is the standard Semitic term meaning "father"; the *ba* part of the word reflects the Aramaic way of making a word definite. In other words, *abba* does not just mean "father"; it means *the father*.... It is not to be equated with the equally phonetically simple expressions "dada" or "daddy" that English-speaking children so easily utter as their first appellation of their earthly fathers. *Abba* is not a nickname; it is not a childish term of sentimentality or endearment. Rather, it is an honorific title that expresses the utmost reverence and respect due to any father—and infinitely more so when referring to the heavenly Father.... Although not a trivial term of endearment, *abba* does express the intimacy of the father-child relationship.<sup>6</sup>

In contemporary language, the believer who cries out "Abba, Father" with great reverence is confessing, "the Father is my Father." The Greek word used for "cry" (*krazomen*) expresses "the fervent utterance of the devout believer," as Leon Morris put it.<sup>7</sup> The word *krazomen* emphasizes that such cries take place in great need, but also that such cries take place as the child of God recognizes his sonship in prayer, in worship, and in responding to the Father's promises. That recognition comes through the witness of the Spirit. In our urgent need while in the

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6. Barrett, *Complete in Him*, 182–83.

7. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 315.

depths of our own darkness, the Spirit suddenly grants us at times the divine right and intimate privilege of crying to Him from the depths of our souls, “Abba, Father!”

Often the witness of the Spirit comes to us almost serendipitously. My good friend Derek Thomas once told me that when he visited Jerusalem, he encountered a wonderful example of this between a young boy and his father who was dressed in the regalia of an orthodox Jew. Since the father was walking much faster than the boy, every few steps the boy would have to run to keep up with his father’s fast pace. The boy finally collapsed, and cried out to his father in desperation, “Abba, abba, abba, abba!” His father turned around, bent down, scooped him up, and carried him away on his shoulders. Dr. Thomas told me that he never grasped the beautiful word “abba” so well as at that moment. That’s it; the God of creation, the God of the heavens and the earth, the God who is holy, the God of the thunder of Sinai, the God who will condemn sinners to hell, that God becomes my Father in Christ Jesus, through the Spirit of adoption, and receives me into His family so that when I cry out with utmost reverence, “Abba, abba,” in all my need, He stoops down, picks me up, embraces me, and carries me forward. This is the distinctive blessing of the New Covenant, that we as believers may call upon God in a profound sense—“Abba, Father,” by the Spirit.

Most commonly the Spirit’s witness may be known and felt as we join Christ’s corporate body in worship, focusing upon the Lord, and our hearts are lifted to recognize with fresh love that God is our Father through Christ the Lord. At such times, we feel the intense consciousness of sonship because of what Christ has done for us on the cross, so that we can rejoice that God is our Father. At other times, we may be engaging in private devotions, or fellowshiping with another believer, or simply driving

down the road when the Spirit may so witness with our spirits that we are secure in the salvation of the triune God, that we may cry out with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God," and with Paul, "Abba, Father," with all the intimacy that these tender yet strong words imply. In that cry, the witness of the Spirit is prominent because that witness is inseparable from the child-Father relationship. Consequently, in such acts of private devotion or in familial communion—especially while worshiping in God's house, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

But there is still more. The Spirit's witnessing of our sonship of adoption within our conscience, based on God's Word, brings us into a whole new way of life. When expounding Romans 8:15, C. E. B. Cranfield said, "In this one brief expression we find the whole of what it means to live in accordance with the will and the law of God."<sup>8</sup> Using abbreviated language here, Cranfield indicated that if we can call God our Father, and if we can cry out, "Abba, Father," this means that behind us is the history of our now belonging to Christ, having been given another mind and attitude—a new set of standards, values, goals, and purposes in life.

A father once told me that a child he was adopting—who was already living with him—once said to him, "If I am adopted, does that mean I can be unadopted?" This boy was soon issued a new birth certificate and could never be unadopted.

The same thing can be said about our relationship with God. If he has adopted us, if He has declared you to be His child, that is irreversible. Forever you will be His

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8. C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans, A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 189.

child. Think about that; revel in it, and find great joy and assurance in the reality of it.

*Fifth, the Spirit's witnessing with our spirits that we are God's children (v. 16)*

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,” verse 16 says. I wish to focus here on adoption and sonship as inseparable from assurance.

There is a repetition of phrases in Romans 8 referring to sonship or family relations for the Christian as part of God's family, which includes “sons of God” (vv. 14, 19), “children of God” (vv. 16, 21), “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (v. 17), and then the explanation of our predestination so as “to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (v. 29). Thus the theme of adoption runs through this highpoint of the Epistle to the Romans. Being adopted as a child of God “is the highest privilege that the gospel offers,” writes J. I. Packer, “higher even than justification.”<sup>9</sup> Justification is primary because our need for forgiveness and right standing with God is present. But adoption steps higher since the forgiven are now part of the family! Paul moves from forensic language in justification to family love in adoption. Packer then expounds several important truths about our adoption and sonship:

- *The entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of it.*
- *Our adoption gives us the key to understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit.*
- *Our adoption shows us the meaning and motives of “gospel holiness,” [that is], Puritan shorthand*

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9. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 186–89.

for authentic Christian living, springing from love and gratitude to God, in contrast with the spurious “legal holiness” that consisted merely of forms, routines, and outward appearances, maintained from self-regarding motives.

- *Our adoption gives the clue we need to see our way through the problem of assurance.* That is, like the Reformers and Luther in particular, we learn to recognize the difference between what Tyndale called “story faith” as opposed to true saving faith. “Faith,” declared Luther, “is a living deliberate confidence in the grace of God, so certain that for it one could die a thousand deaths, and such confidence...makes us joyous, intrepid, and cheerful towards God and all creation.”<sup>10</sup>

This personal realization of being adopted by our heavenly Father into His family changes our entire lives. Like Jesus, our entire goal in life now becomes doing our Father's will (John 5:30). We now strive to control our thoughts, words, and lives by the conviction that God is our Father and we are His children. When Romans 8 is set alongside 1 John 3, it becomes obvious that our glorious adoption greatly impacts our every relationship, including:

(1) *Our relationship with the triune God.* We now find our greatest love in God the Father and His Son, so that we share as God's adopted children in the very love with which the Father loves His Son (John 17:23). We now find our security in the fatherhood of God, knowing that He will mold and train us according to His eternal plan for Christ's sake. We find our security in Immanuel's atonement in fulfilling His Father's will and dying for us as

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10. Packer, *Knowing God*, 190–203.

ungodly sinners. We find our security in the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, knowing that He will never forsake us.

I know I am entering a realm of mystery here that is better felt than told, but, especially when we are cast down and afflicted, weak and faint, and are in trouble and trial, the Holy Spirit makes His comforting presence known and grants us a gracious reviving so that we are lifted in spirit. When we feel deserted, He comes and moves us to fervent prayer; we feel contact with the Father and the Son by the Spirit, and our hearts open so that we with unspeakable liberty pour out our souls in prayer to the Almighty (cf. Rom. 8:23–28). By the Spirit's felt presence, we experience fresh visitation from on High, sweet fellowship and communion with the triune God, such that we know we are the adopted children of God.

The Holy Spirit is the one bringing us into that sweet fellowship. What a joy it is for a believer to know that this Spirit inhabits us, and moves us to embrace God as our Father, and the Son of God as our Elder Brother. Speaking of the Spirit, Jesus says in John 4:14: "But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Later Jesus says, "Out of his belly [the inner man] shall flow rivers of living water." And John adds, "But this spake he of the Spirit" (John 7:38, 39). So the Spirit indwells the believer, and there are times when the believer, in his own conscience, may co-witness with the Spirit's witness that he actually feels and knows that indwelling. At such times, the triune God and His truth is embraced with assurance, so that the truths of the Bible become more real and alive and precious than anything in this life. Adoption greatly augments our relationship with the triune God for good.

(2) *Our view of affliction.* Inevitably, our relationship with God as Father involves discipline because our Father will not allow us to be less than what He intends us to be. It affects the way that we face adversity, suffering, and difficulties because, as children of God, Romans 8:28 does truly mean that God is causing all things to work together for our good as His children!

(3) *Our relationship to ourselves.* As 1 John 3:3 says, "Every man that hath this hope [of adoption] in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Every adopted child of God knows that holiness is an important part of God's purpose for happiness in God's family. Thus, every believer wants to purify himself daily, by using the spiritual disciplines to mortify and put off the old nature and to put on the new (Col. 3:8–17). And when he does so as a believer, he will discover that his increased assurance of adoption by God combined with personal holiness will deliver him from a burden of cares, fears, and doubts. He will feel like a new person. All the advantages of being assured of his adoption and salvation will accrue to him, for assurance "produces heaven on earth, sweetens life's changes, keeps the heart from desiring the world, assists communion with God, preserves from backsliding, produces holy boldness, prepares a man for death, makes mercies taste like mercies, gives vigor in Christian service, and leads to the soul's enjoyment of Christ."<sup>11</sup>

(4) *Our relationship with believers.* Being part of our Father's family affects our behavior so that we have a desire to live as sons and to be like our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. As God's adopted children in Christ and by His Spirit, we learn to love our brothers and sisters in

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11. Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, 129, 139–47.

Christ in a way that human nature could not forge. We now see every true Christian friend as a gift of the Holy Spirit. We recognize in each other the saving ministry of the Spirit through the marks and fruits of grace, and the Spirit enables us through godly fellowship to strengthen each other in assurance. The Spirit uses believers to help other believers on the way to the Celestial City. As Paul comforted others with the comfort with which he was comforted by God (2 Cor. 1:4), so believers move others to greater assurance through the assurance with which they themselves have been assured by God. As adopted sons, we learn to view the details of our days through loving family eyes—the family of God, even to the point of being willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters (1 John 3:14–18).

(5) *Our relationship with the world.* First John 3:1b tells us that this relationship will be a troubled one: “the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” On the one hand, we share with Jesus the unspeakable love of the Father, but on the other hand, we share with Jesus the hostility, estrangement, and even hatred of the world. We ought not to be surprised when the world despises us, for it despised—even crucified—our Elder Brother.

(6) *Our relationship with our future hope.* Sonship certainly affects our hope, because as children of God we are also declared to be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). “When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). We have a glorious, sin-free future with our everlasting Father, our Elder Brother, and countless brothers and sisters, among

an innumerable army of angels. Heaven, as Edwards said, will be a sin-free world of love.<sup>12</sup>

What a future God's adopted children have! At times, the Holy Spirit may give God's children assured and special foretastes of it—especially as they draw near to the Celestial City. Here is one example written by Edward Payson (1783–1827), an American Congregational preacher, who wrote to his sister from his deathbed:

Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah of which I have been now for some weeks a happy inhabitant. The Celestial City of my deathbed is nearly full in my view. Its glories beam down upon me. Its breezes fan me. Its odors are wafted to me. Its sounds strike upon my ears. Its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me now from heaven but the river of death which now appears as an insignificant little stream that may be crossed at a single step whenever God should give me permission to go home. The Son of Righteousness has gradually been drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as He approaches. And now He fills the whole hemisphere of my life, pouring forth a flood of glory in which I seem to float. A single heart and a single tongue seem altogether inadequate to my needs. I want a whole heart for every separate emotion that flows through me, a whole tongue to express that emotion. Oh, my sister, my sister, could you but know what awaits the Christian! Could you but know what I now know, you would not refrain from rejoicing and leaping for joy at my departure.<sup>13</sup>

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12. For a longer treatment of these changed relationships, see Joel R. Beeke, *The Epistles of John* (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 2006), 124–29.

13. Edward Payson, *Memoir: Select Thoughts and Sermons of the late Rev. Edward Payson*, 3 vols. (Portland: Hyde, Lord & Duren, 1846), 1:406–7.

Who taught Payson this? Obviously, the Holy Spirit! As the Spirit opened this for Edward Payson, I don't have to tell you that his conscience co-witnessed with the Spirit he was a child of God on his way to glory.

*Sixth, the Spirit's assurance connected with heirship and suffering (v. 17)*

Finally, this amazing section stressing how the Spirit assures believers of salvation concludes by speaking about the child of God's heirship (v. 17a) and suffering (v. 17b)—both of which are signs of adoption. Those who are led and adopted by the Spirit are “heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

The greatest privilege of adoption is *heirship*. God's adopted children are all royal heirs-apparent and co-heirs with Christ. “Men may have many children yet but one is an heir,” wrote Jeremiah Burroughs. “But all the children of God are heirs.”<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 12:23 calls them “the first-born, which are written in heaven.”

An heir becomes the owner of all that belongs to another person when that person dies. An heir has the full legal right to ownership because of the will and testament made by the person giving the inheritance. Receiving an inheritance therefore is always a bittersweet thing. On the one hand, you are gifted with an inheritance. On the other hand, that inheritance only becomes yours because your loved one has died. You are left with the inheritance instead of with your loved one.

How astonishing Paul's statement is: the sons of God are heirs of God! The Father sent Jesus Christ as the God-man to the cross to purchase the legal right for the holy offended God to adopt sinners by faith in Jesus Christ and

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14. Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness*, 192.

to make them heirs of Him who is the legal heir of all that God possesses—yes, of *all* things, Hebrews 1:2 says.

But you will then ask why you lack so much in this world, or why you face so many crises. The answer lies in the assuring Spirit conjoining your inheritance with your suffering, because suffering is part of the inheritance. God has appointed His children joint heirs with Christ. Christ came to this inheritance by suffering in this world, and therefore God uses suffering to prepare His sons for glory. That's why Romans 8:17 adds that we are "joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Sons receive the discipline of their fathers, do they not? God disciplines His children and heirs to make us partakers of His righteousness and holiness (Heb. 12:10–11).

The consciousness of sonship even values suffering in identity with Jesus Christ, as Romans 8:17b says: "if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Suffering is not viewed as an end in itself but points to a greater end of being glorified together with Christ. The Spirit makes us conscious that Christ is everything, so that even in suffering we identify with Him, knowing that we also are following His pattern: suffering before glory. And in that process, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

But glory is coming—glory and kingship together with Christ, Paul says: "that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17c). The Puritans make much of joint-heirship with Christ in terms of kingship. As co-heirs with Christ, believers share in Christ's kingship, and therefore partake of the kingdom of heaven as their inheritance. Believers are made kings to the Father in His spiritual kingdom in three respects, wrote Thomas Granger: "1. Because they are lords and conquerors of their enemies, sin, Satan, the world, death, and hell.

2. They are partakers of the kingdom of Christ and of salvation; for we have received of Christ grace for grace, and glory for glory. 3. They have interest, dominion, and sovereignty of all things by Christ.”<sup>15</sup> Herman Witsius stressed that this “all things” includes the right of “possession of the whole world,” which was given to but lost by Adam (Gen. 1:28; 3:24), promised to Abraham (Rom. 4:13), and repurchased by Christ “for himself and his brethren” (Ps. 8:6), so that now all things, both present and to come, are His people’s.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, believers are lords and possessors of all things, because they belong to Christ, who belongs to God (1 Cor. 3:21–23).<sup>17</sup>

Simply said, dear child of God, this means that your Father in heaven who owns every blade of grass in the world, all the cattle on a thousand hills, and all the galaxies in the universe, and has given it all into the hands of Jesus who died for you, makes you an heir and joint-heir with Christ of all things so that all things belong to you in Christ—who can comprehend that? As Eric Moerdyk says, “Every log you sit on is God’s couch. Every color you see was painted with God’s paintbrush. It is your Father’s world and one of the main reasons He made it was to make you a home to live in. He gave you senses so you could share His pleasure in His creation. In Jesus He has made you an heir of all this—and one day you will live and reign together with Him over all things, being made kings and priests unto our God! This is what it means to be an heir of God.”<sup>18</sup>

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15. Thomas Granger, *A Looking Glasse for Christians, Or, The Comfortable Doctrine of Adoption* (London, 1620), [26].

16. Herman Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 1:452–53.

17. Perkins, *Works*, 1:82, 369.

18. Eric Moerdyk, sermon no. 42 on Canons of Dort, Head V, art. 10 (part 5)—see [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com).

Nothing in this world can match the inheritance of believers. It knows no *corruption* (1 Peter 1:4)—not “by outward principles, as fire, violence, etc.; nor by inward principles, as sin and other taints which defile” (see 1 Peter 1:18). It has no *succession*. The heavenly Father and His children always live out of the same inheritance, so believers’ inheritance is as unchangeable as Christ’s priesthood is (Heb. 7:24). It faces no *division*. Every heir enjoys the whole inheritance, since God is both “infinite and indivisible.” “God gives his all, not half, but his whole kingdom” (see Gen. 25:5; Rev. 21:7).<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Romans 8:12–17 makes clear that the witness of the Spirit is an important part of the believer’s life and assurance. It is a gift from the Father to assure His children that we truly belong to Him. Let us not be content with trite methods for procuring assurance of salvation. Let us see that God has given us the Spirit of His Son, so that we might cry, “Abba! Father!”

But what if my love for God is weak and faint, and I don’t have freedom to call God my personal Father with assurance? Go to Him anyway. Go to Him as your Creator and Sustainer when you are plagued with an absence of the comfort that he’s also your Father. Go to Him like the prodigal in humble ways, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:21). Go to Him as your want-to-be-Father, crying out, “I believe, Lord; help my unbelief; I very much want to be Thy child, and for Thee to be my Father.” Above all, go to the Father in the name of the perfect Son of God. Use the Lord Jesus Christ. He

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19. Drake, *Puritan Sermons*, 5:334; cf. Owen, *Works*, 2:218–21, and Burroughs, *The Saints’ Happiness*, 196.

loves to be taken advantage of by us at such times! If you can't come to God as your Father, go to Him as the God and Father of the only Savior there is, your Lord Jesus Christ. Let Him bring you into God's presence and introduce you to His Father. He encourages you to come by the Son to the Father when He says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

Let these thoughts help you to keep coming to God even when you feel doubts about your sonship. Don't leave the heavenly Father alone—keep coming to Him by and through His Son, waiting on Him, until you, too, can freely cry out, "Abba, Father!" Amen.

## **Enduring Persecution in the Christian Life**

*Rev. Mark Kelderman*

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3

Text: 2 Timothy 3:11–12

Many today are persecuted for the sake of the gospel. I especially think of those countries where Christians who meet together as we do would be meeting at the risk of their lives, at the risk of being tortured. In other places, ministers are being put into prisons and silenced from the pulpit. And even in North America, we are seeing a growing dichotomy, a growing separation between those who will live godly and those who will not. History shows that the more the church is faithful to the Word of God, the sharper witness she gives to the world of the destruction that is coming, when this world will be devoured with flames and the evil-doers who dwell therein will be burned up (see Mal. 4:1). The more she points out the gracious character of God Himself and the deceitfulness of men, the more the church of God will find she is persecuted. This will increase as we see the last day approaching, in which the Son of Man will come upon the clouds of heaven (Matt. 24:30).

When we have a day set aside for our observance, such as the national day of prayer for the persecuted church, we could indeed focus on those who are persecuted worldwide—how we are to pray for them and what sort of

situations they are finding themselves in. Yet, when we read or hear of them, we learn that they would not have us focus on them, but would rather have us focus on Christ. At many times, I am afraid, the persecuted church is praying more for us than we are praying for them. They are praying for the people in the West who have been defiled through the riches of this world, who are not giving a consistent witness to the name of Jesus Christ. Is this you, is this me they are praying for? Could it be that we don't even remember those who are in bonds as being bound with them (Heb. 13:3)? Therefore, in light of this persecution world-wide, let us turn to 2 Timothy, chapter 3, where, with the help of the Lord, we will receive instruction from God's Word. We will look at the end of verse 11, and all of verse 12. We read there, "...what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

In these verses, we will see:

1. Godly Living
2. Guaranteed Persecution
3. Glorious Deliverance

### **Godly Living**

The apostle Paul knew what it was to be persecuted and what it was to be abased; but the amazing thing is that he also knew what it was to have been a persecutor. By the grace of God, he would then become one who was persecuted. In 2 Corinthians 11, we read:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the

heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

What do you glory in—your name, or your infirmity for the sake of Christ? Even while Paul is writing this letter to his spiritual son Timothy, he is in prison for the name and sake of Christ. He writes of this in verse 8 of chapter 1, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.” And Paul warns Timothy that there will come into the church false teachers, “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:5, 7). They shall be “evil men,” he tells Timothy, “seducers” who “shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Paul says to his son Timothy, in effect, “Timothy, look at me, look at my life. You have known and seen my doctrine, what manner of life I have lived, my purpose, my faith, my long-suffering, my charity, my patience.” Then he says, “Timothy, you have seen the persecutions and afflictions I have endured.” And he adds, as it were, in parentheses, this very thought, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

### **Guaranteed Persecution**

What is it to live godly in Christ Jesus? Why does Paul put this in connection with the phrase, “shall suffer persecution”? The Holy Spirit here, through the apostle Paul, does not want to give us the idea that simply living godly, that is, morally, in this world is sufficient. Many people

attempt or are moving back to some morality in their life. You hear that when you speak with people on the plane. They have two or three children at home and they've realized that this world has nothing to offer and they have tried everything in the world, from drugs to immorality. Now they try to teach their children the right way; they see that there is something attractive about morality after all, but they forget what Paul says here, "godly *in Christ Jesus*." They separate living godly from Him who gave the commandments, the moral law. It is only when we are *in Christ Jesus* that we can live godly. To live godly and to be in Christ Jesus is, for Paul, one thought, one idea, one concept, one truth. To live godly presupposes that we are made righteous by Christ, that we are born again, that we have been made one with Him with a lively, true, and saving faith—not in our own righteousness, but in the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

In the world today, we are confronted with a large number of choices. There are many churches you could visit. There are many religions you could choose to belong to. Indeed, the common opinion among many in this world goes something like this: "You can believe what you want to believe but I will believe what I want to believe. You must respect my opinion and I will respect your opinion, as long as you are not exclusive in your opinion. You must allow me to believe what I want to; you can have your beliefs, and I will have mine. Don't tell me that mine is wrong and yours is right. We are all entitled to our own opinions. If I define adultery in different terms than you do, that's my opinion and my choice." But we find something different in this text. Paul says that living godly in Christ Jesus is the *only* way. He is referring back to what he wrote in verse 10, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience." All of those who hear the gospel, but especially

those who are saved by Christ, are called to live godly in Christ Jesus. It doesn't then simply become a privatized affair, where I simply have my own religion to myself; instead, we are to live godly in the midst of this world. We must give testimony to the One who has bought us. It must be confessed. It must be lived.

What is your confession in the midst of this world? Can you say that you have lived your life so that people looking at you day by day would say to their friends and fellow workers, "There is one that walks like Christ walked"? Do you walk in the midst of your family so that you're known for calling sin sin, grace grace, and God God? Do you do this with humility and a recognition that, but for the grace of God, there go I? And yet nevertheless, do you speak out against sin and for the good? Do you bring God's Word to bear upon your families and your friends? No, we don't go about looking for trouble in the midst of this world, as if we are looking for persecution, but the fact is, if we don't have any persecution without and within, then we ought to question whether we are living godly in Christ Jesus.

Whom do you fear more, God or man? Who is the greatest in your life? Who influences your decisions day by day? Who influences your actions? Little children, when you are in school and one of your friends or classmates asks you to do something that you know you shouldn't do, what is your first thought? Is it, "I wonder what they will think of me if I don't do this thing," and, "they won't be my friend," or do you think about how God sees the situation? If God says you shouldn't do it, therefore you can't do it. Who is greater? Whom do you serve, God or man? Indeed, God's people often fall into the fear of man. Think of Elijah standing on Mount Carmel, saying, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (see 1 Kings 18:21). A few hours later, in front of Jezebel, he runs.

When we speak of the persecution of those who are suffering in other lands for the name of Christ, we can sympathize with them. We may even consider dying for Christ if it came to that point. But sometimes it is easier to say that we will die for Him than it is to say we will live for Him. If I told you that you would not need to suffer death to serve Him and to live godly, but you must spend your years being unpopular, being poor, being ignored, being criticized, being mocked, is that something you would choose to do? There are many today who, because of this reality, have put their faith on a shelf, whatever kind of faith it may be, and have joined themselves with the world. They think, “If this doesn’t work, I can try it again.” Whom do you fear more, men or God? You know, it is easy to take a trip to Mexico and go to a large city, like Toronto or New York, and speak to the people on the street and evangelize them, but if we haven’t done that in our own homes, whom are we fearing, whom do we live unto? Are you living godly in Christ Jesus? There is no one here who has consistently had the boldness and clarity with which Jesus testified to the gospel. There is no one here who is able to extract that fear of man from their heart as we ought to do and to open our mouths to speak to others and seek to be conformed to the image of Christ, so that we would more and more live godly in Christ Jesus, and then to do this even if this makes us appear as unpopular fools in the sight of the world. Are you going to be able to rise up in the midst of this generation on the last day and say, “I have witnessed to you,” or will the world testify against *you*, rising up in judgement against *you*?

Indeed, the days are coming when we may be worshipping in homes and in barns. Are you ready? Have you counted the cost? Are you ready to be counted among those who do not bow the knee to this world? The real

question is, are you living godly in Christ Jesus? As I said, this does not entail simply living a moral lifestyle and coming to church. Those things are necessary indeed, but are you seeking to be holy *in Christ*? Do you seek your holiness in Him and then seek to live a life of gratitude to Him for His glorious salvation? Is it the practice of your life to avoid every sin as it comes into your mind? Do you crucify it at every cost, seeking the grace of God to put it to death within you? You all have the calling to live Christianly. At your work, in your everyday life, you are called to live out this calling. Are you seeking to be conformed more and more to Christ in every area of your life? Are you more and more dependent upon the intercession and mediatorial work of Christ alone? Do you need Him more and more every day and go to Him for forgiveness and cleansing and strength for another day and another hour? Are you in Christ Jesus? That means a life of obedience. We read that Jesus Himself learned obedience by the things He suffered. And God brings His people through trials and afflictions so that they too might learn obedience. It is by way of afflictions, trials, and persecutions that the child of God often grows the most. It is not an enjoyable way for the flesh, but it is a profitable one. It is impossible that we should be equal to Jesus in His sufferings and pains, but we *are* called to resemble Him.

Who is able to live godly in Christ Jesus as we are called to do? This life of obedience and this godly living seems more fit for angels and “just men made perfect” than for us who remain in the flesh and have sin dwelling within. To live godly in Christ Jesus is only possible if we are dependent on the mediatorial work of Christ, who is at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for His church. His work is full and complete. He sits at the right hand of God. God sees the work of His Son and He is satisfied. The angels see the work of Christ and they

are amazed and wonder. Then if we think we have to get up and work, how wrong we are! We are to rest satisfied in what He has done, and at the end of each day we are to confess we come short, we've fallen again, proving once more that we are unprofitable servants. What a wonder it is, then, when we come to the throne of grace and mercy, that we find we are not cast away for all our defects! When we look to that One who sits at the right hand of His Father, then we have bold access to the throne of God in confidence that we will be heard by faith in Him who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification, who "ever lives to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25).

Do you live godly in Christ Jesus? If so, you will suffer persecution. That is our second thought, the guarantee of persecution.

### **Guaranteed Persecution**

Paul says, "All those that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This is a constant theme of Scripture. But it is a theme that we, in this twenty-first century of wealth and luxury, seem to forget. You find this theme time and again in the Scriptures. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12–16,

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

Was it not our Lord Himself who said, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (see Matt. 5:10–12)? He calls to you and me, “take up your cross and follow Me.” In other words, Jesus is saying the same thing as Paul, “all who will live godly shall suffer persecution.”

Paul doesn’t tell us the degree of persecution we will suffer; he doesn’t tell us whether we will suffer unto death, or suffer inward trial, temptation, and persecution. Indeed, the Lord can give His people a quiet and a calm life. Proverbs 16:7 says that when a man’s ways please the Lord, He “maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” And yet the text we are considering, as well as much of the rest of Scripture, sets forth (as can be found in Genesis 3:15) the antithesis, the disagreement and the collision course between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. So Paul is here not only referring to his own life; he is referring to the lives of all believers. All who live godly must plan on suffering.

And what sufferings did Paul want to point out to Timothy? In Acts 13 and 14, we see what Paul endured and what he was most likely referring to when he speaks of “persecutions and afflictions which came to me at Antioch, Iconium, and at Lystra.” What is he saying? At the beginning of Acts 13, we find that he had preached for two Sabbaths at Antioch. The Jews had become very angry with his preaching that Christ was the Messiah, while the Gentiles were glad. Then in Acts 13:49, we read, “the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and persecuted

Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.”

So Paul and Barnabas turn to Iconium and there they speak the Word, and again you read in chapter 14 that unbelieving Jews stir up insurrection against them. You can see throughout the book of Acts that there is a clear refusal of the Jews to bow before Christ. Often, those who are called religious persecute the church the most. When they are about to be assaulted in chapter 14, they flee to Lystra and Derbe, and immediately they preach the gospel, perform the miracle of healing the lame man, and then certain Jews come from Antioch and Iconium and they persuade the people to stone Paul. They drag him out of the city and leave him for dead, and then verses 20–22 say, “Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had taught many, they returned again”—to the places they were persecuted—“to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.” Paul in essence is telling Timothy, “Don’t forget, it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of God.”

Isn’t it being engaged in warfare that makes a soldier a good soldier? Suffering is necessary for triumph. Without this, do you really show that you are living godly in Christ Jesus? Without this, are you showing whether you fear God or fear man? I can tell you that no matter what persecutions come, if you may by grace live godly in Christ Jesus, there is no greater joy and no greater satisfaction than to serve Him, no matter what persecutions, trials,

and afflictions we experience. The pleasure of sin can never afford what God offers in salvation through His Son. We must always realize that when we are born again, and begin to live, by the grace of God, godly in Christ Jesus, we are declaring war against sin and the world, and sin and the world in turn declare war on us. Human nature is basically the same from the beginning of the world until this very day. Cain's anger toward his brother Abel still exists today. How often does it happen that two unbelievers are married and then, when one of them comes to faith in Christ, the unbeliever persecutes the believer? Perhaps a young person is converted and there are others who mock and ridicule him. Perhaps at one time he was praised for being the life of the party; now he is despised. God's people are called to endure slander and ridicule not only from the world but, sad to say, often from within the church. Brothers and sisters who call upon the same God revile one another. Let it not be once so named among you. Christ says, "All men shall say all manner of evil against you," but He makes clear that they shall do it "falsely." So if anyone speaks evil of you or me, it ought to be because they do it falsely. There ought to be no ground for anyone to say anything against us. We ought to give no reason for them to speak negatively concerning us. We must give a good testimony of the life we are called to live. And again, I do not specify to you what kind or degree or manner of persecution you will endure when you faithfully serve the Lord, but Scripture makes certain that you will have persecution. Thomas Watson said, "Persecution is the legacy bequeathed from Christ to His people." Jesus said in John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

When we follow Jesus Himself from the manger, because there was no place for Him in the inn, all the

way to the cross, we must ask ourselves, was there any persecution like His persecution? He was reviled, He was slandered, He was mocked, He was rebuked, He was bruised, He was smitten, He was crucified, He was spoken evil against falsely. What a contrast! The Son of man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, was forsaken even by His disciples in that hour of need. Do you shrink back from suffering for Him? Despite Jesus's suffering, where was His eye? His eye was focused on the will of His Father: "Thy will be done, not mine." And that's where the anchor of our hope, that's where our eye must be focused as well, so that it does not fall on the circumstances and the persecutions which befall us but falls instead upon the will of our heavenly Father. That's why Paul writes to Timothy, "but out of them all the Lord delivered me." This is our third thought: glorious deliverance.

### **Glorious Deliverance**

Paul writes to Timothy, "but out of them all the Lord delivered me." Paul is implying by these words that in each and every persecution he has had, the Lord has been faithful to His word. He has given words to speak. He has given the strength in the hour of need. Paul is saying that whatever afflictions you are called to endure, church of God, the Lord will deliver you out of them all. That is the comfort Paul wants Timothy and us to rejoice in. "Timothy," he says, "you are surrounded by false teachers; I see them on every side, and they are denying the Lord who bought them." That is what he says also in verse 13: "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." Paul says, "Despite all of this which you see, the Lord delivers out of all things." The Lord does not send a persecution or trial in our life, without also giving grace to undergo it. Didn't He also say to Paul, "My strength is sufficient for thee"? And so, dear believer, this truth is the

same for you. Your Father has set a boundary which Satan cannot pass in your life. The very hairs of your head are numbered. Are not the thoughts that come into your mind, the persecutions and afflictions that come from without, also in the hand of Him with whom we have to do? If you are mocked and ridiculed for your convictions and beliefs, if you are threatened and have few or no friends, does not Christ promise to be a friend who sticks closer than a brother? If you are tempted by your own wicked heart, by your old-man nature, take courage, one day that old-man nature shall be finally put to death in the grave. You shall be clothed with the glory of Christ. You shall appear like Him when He appears. Are you forsaken by family and friends? Fear not, the Lord will reveal Himself to you as the one born blind. Are you afraid that someday you will be cast into prison, that they will drug you with drugs so that your mind seems to explode, or that your body will be racked with shackles of iron and then you will deny Him? Even then, Christ will send His angels to minister His own presence in your heart by His Word and Spirit. They will comfort you.

This is a comfort, my friends, which the world can never give you. There is no comfort like that in this world. This comfort is only for those who are *in Christ Jesus*. We read of the martyrs of old who cried at the stake, "Come, you Papists, if you want a miracle, here behold one as we are in this bed of flames. This is a bed of flames, but to us, it is a bed of down." O fear not them who can harm your body. Fear not man—once they have destroyed the body they can do no more—but fear God; He alone is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. Though you be threatened to be burned alive, think of Daniel and his three friends; He will be in the midst of the flame with you, or those flames themselves will be the chariot that ushers you into glory in the presence of the One you love.

O dare, dare to live godly in Christ Jesus, though you suffer all manner of persecution. Isn't that what we read in 2 Corinthians 4? "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed...always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.... For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Indeed, in ourselves we cannot live godly in Christ Jesus, unless we are under the sway and dominion of Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, the question is, are you energized by the grace and Spirit of Christ? From Him is your fruit found? Though we bear temptation, though we bear tribulation and trial and persecution, it is He who enables us. We live, yet not we, but Christ lives in us and the life we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God (see Gal. 2:20). That is the glorious deliverance that is promised to the church of God, to all who live godly in Christ Jesus. Jesus Himself says in Luke 21:28, "lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh," and furthermore He says, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And when by faith we see that we are made one with Him, then the One who has overcome the world gives us the power and the strength we need to live godly in Christ Jesus, to endure the persecution, suffering, and trials that come upon us. This was Paul's hope, Paul's confidence, and Paul's consolation. Child of God, this ought to be your hope as well.

### **Conclusion**

How does Paul conclude his letter to Timothy? There he is in prison, enduring persecution, and he writes to Timothy, "Continue thou in the things thou hast heard and

hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Tim. 3:14). He writes in 2 Timothy 4:6–8, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Then he concludes by saying, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4:17–18).

There are several questions I set before you today. Since all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, the first question is, are you living godly? Are you living out of Christ or are you still living on your own account? Is your father still “the one whom you serve, even sin and Satan,” or can you say, “Our Father who art in heaven”? Are you *in Christ Jesus*? Are you living godly?

The second question is, Are you being persecuted or are you a persecutor? Are you being persecuted without cause or are there causes why people persecute you? We read in Revelation 12:7–11:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren

is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Do you know the accuser of the brethren, who often persecutes within, sometimes even more than the world persecutes without? When he comes and he points to a particular sin, to a going-astray, when he says, “Now there is no hope for you,” this is persecution too. We are called to overcome him in the blood of the Lamb. Then on that day, when we have overcome him *in Christ Jesus*, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself shall wipe away every tear from our eyes, every sorrow from our heart. He will hold us in His tender loving embrace, forever with the Lord. Amen.

# Baptism and the Covenant of Grace

*Rev. David Lipsy*

Scripture Reading: Galatians 3:1–18, Hebrews 8:6–13

Texts: Galatians 3:17–18, Hebrews 8:10–12

Why are we having baptism today? Is it because a believer has come to faith in Christ? No, not today. Is it because the infants to be baptized are saved? We don't know that for sure. Is it because baptism will somehow *save* these children? No. Why then? Why baptism *today* with these parents and their babies? It is because the living God is *our* God and the God of our children. These parents will confess that before God and the congregation, solemnly pledging, with God's help, to bring up these children as *His* children, to rear them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We are having baptism today, not primarily to focus on baptism, but because *baptism* has us focus on God and on His covenant with us and our seed.

Baptism is about *covenant*. Scripture is about covenant. Salvation is about covenant. God's dealings with mankind are about covenant. So this will be that upon which we will focus at this time. May the Lord bring added clarity to a subject that has sorely divided His church for a long time. May our focus indeed be upon the Lord and His dealings with us so that, at the end of the day, we may bless the Lord our God from the heart.

We have two texts for this occasion Galatians 3:17–18 and Hebrews 8:10–12: “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” and “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”

We will consider baptism and the covenant of grace with the help of these texts under three main headings: the covenant patterns, the covenant parameters, and the covenant pleading ground for believers and their seed. As we begin, let us first look at patterns in Scripture with respect to the doctrine of God’s covenant dealings with His people.

### **1. Covenant Patterns Concerning Believers and Their Seed**

All of us confess that God’s revelation is *progressive*. In other words, He unfolded truth to mankind over time, not giving everything at once, at the beginning, but instead revealing some truths at the beginning and then elaborating on them over time. Other truths are not revealed at the first but over time they are brought into view in their proper place.

But covenant is a reality that is brought to the foreground early and repeatedly in Scripture. One revelation

of covenant builds upon another so that our understanding of covenant grows as we consider each subsequent revelation of it. So there are aspects of covenant that change over time. Other aspects remain the same. It is important to keep this in mind when considering covenant.

### *Covenant Patterns Concerning Adam and Noah and Their Seed*

Though explicit mention of covenant does not appear in the first chapters of Genesis when describing God's relationship with man before the fall, it is clear from Romans 5 that the apostle viewed Christ as head over all who are saved, and Adam as the head of all who sin. Jesus Christ, then, already shines through this history, albeit in shadow form. Paul goes back and forth between Adam and Christ, comparing and contrasting them. And as we shall shortly see, this kind of relationship, where God has dealings with the one and the many who are associated with the one, is standard covenantal language that God repeatedly uses. Let's see if we can trace patterns regarding covenant in both testaments.

We have already seen that God's prohibition to Adam and Eve not to eat of the forbidden tree affected not only Adam, but all who would proceed from him. We are all involved in his fall (Rom. 5:12). Was there a sign of that covenant? In a way there was. Negatively, there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Positively, there was the tree of life. Was Adam a believer after all? God does not explicitly say. However, after God's promise of a deliverer, we don't see in Adam anything of the sinful, rebellious spirit that characterized Cain, his son. Adam appears to have worn, without murmuring, the covering of animal skin that God gave to him and Eve. He named his wife "Eve," meaning the mother of all living, after he fell into sin, seemingly to indicate that there was life to

be had even after sin. Eve, for her part, when receiving their firstborn, said, “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” It also seems apparent that they taught their children, Cain and Abel, to sacrifice, indicating some understanding of the significance of that mode of worship. So it would appear that this first covenant was made with what appears to be a believing couple and their seed.

Later, just prior to the Flood, we hear God speaking to a believing Noah, “But with thee will I establish my covenant” (Gen. 6:18). It would seem, just from these words, that God’s first explicit mention of covenant was to Noah alone. But as is the nature of progressive revelation, we read three chapters later, “And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your seed after you” (Gen. 9:9). A few verses after that, “covenant” is expanded even further: “This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you” and then later still, “between me and the earth.” As to a sign of that covenant, God chose the rainbow as He explicitly states in Genesis 9:13. So this covenant was made with believing Noah and his seed, both with the godly Shem and the ungodly Ham as well as many, many others, even all the offspring of believing Noah. In the Gospels, Jesus would show that children too are included in His kingdom (Matt. 19:14).

#### *Covenant Patterns Concerning Abraham and His Seed*

Moving ahead to Genesis 15:18 we read, “In the same day the LORD...made a covenant with Abram.” Once again, God expands this covenant in Genesis 17:7, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.” As in the covenant with Noah, there is a sign associated with this covenant as well. “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your

foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” This covenant sign was to be administered, ordinarily, to infant boys by the explicit command of God. “He that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you” (Gen. 17:12). Abram was circumcised, as were his sons, Ishmael and Isaac, as well as Isaac’s sons, Esau and Jacob. This covenant was begun with believing Abram and extended to his seed. But there was an additional feature of the covenant made with Abraham. In Genesis 17:12–13 we are told, “Every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed must needs be circumcised.” Here the pattern is expanded from the believer and his seed to the believer and his *household*, i.e. all who lived under his headship. But it did not apply to those who had been allied with Abraham, like Aner, Eschol and Mamre who had helped him in battle. So already at this early date God was indicating that believers have a sanctifying influence on their household and therefore the covenant sign would be applied to them too.

We find the same pattern with respect to Isaac: “I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his seed after him” (Gen. 17:19). God mentioned these covenant relationships when He looked upon the afflictions of His people Israel in Egypt (Ex. 2:24). Jesus once again appears “through the lattice” as it were, since in the New Testament we learn that, because of what Jesus did, we too may be adopted into the household of God (Gal. 4:4–5).

### *Covenant Patterns Concerning Moses and Israel*

Later in Exodus, God would establish another covenant, this time with the entire people of Israel, a covenant quite distinct from that made with Abraham, as is made clear in passages like Deuteronomy 5:2–3 and the New Testament

book of Hebrews. The pattern, however, held. In Exodus 19:3–6 we read, “Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Here, God covenants with the whole church, the church in the wilderness, as Stephen would later call it (Acts 7:38). They would be a peculiar treasure to the Lord, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He would be their God, and they His people. And as we have seen previously, this covenant would be made with believers in Israel as well as those who would die in unbelief in the wilderness. They all were a sanctified people, a people set apart by God, set apart for Himself, His care over them exemplified by the laws He gave, His presence with them, and the gospel couched in the ceremonies.

In addition to the sign of circumcision, the Lord gave Moses a second sign of this covenant. In Exodus 24:8 we read, “And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you.” Circumcision would set them apart by teaching them they were His, but the blood pointed to that which they needed in order to be in a saving relationship with Him, pointing of course to the coming Messiah. So circumcision marked His claims upon them, while the blood pointed to that which alone could bring them into a saving relationship with Him.

To make the covenant picture complete between God and Israel, God would also mention the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant throughout their generations (Ex. 24:8), teaching them and us that holiness, i.e. the keeping of God’s commands, is a vital aspect of being in a covenantal

relationship with Him. “Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Jesus can be seen in this aspect of covenant expansion, for through His atoning work, we who believe are accounted “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9).

In Leviticus 26, God warned Israel about breaking His covenant made on Mount Sinai, telling them the many and grievous judgments He would send on account of it, even to the point of captivity. But even then, when completely broken as a nation and scattered among their enemies, cities wasted, faint of heart, pining away in their iniquity, we nevertheless read these remarkable words, “Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember.... And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God.” Here was a durable covenant over against one which they broke. The durable remained while the other made on Sinai would fade away, a covenant Israel broke by their iniquities against Him. Even though many Israelites sinned against God, even though so many remained unbelievers till their death, and even after receiving the covenant sign of circumcision, God did not disannul His covenant with believing Abram and his seed. Paul repeated the same point in Galatians 3:17, “And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” Jesus’s redemptive work assures us that all of God’s promises are, in Him, Amen (2 Cor. 1:20).

*Covenant Patterns Concerning David*

David, in his day, wrote that God made with him an everlasting covenant—ordered in all things and sure. And whereas David mentions covenant but once in the historical books of Scripture, his references to it in the Psalms are many: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14); “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah” (Ps. 89:3–4); “He hath remembered his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham” (Ps. 105:8–9). So the pattern remained, God covenanting with believers and their households.

By way of review then, in each Old Testament instance, God took the initiative to establish His covenant with believers. He included in His covenantal dealings believers’ children. He expanded His covenantal dealings to include their households. He expanded His covenantal dealings to include a nation, and even after that nation came into dire straits, He maintained the covenant He established with Abraham before Israel ever existed. It is with these truths in view that we approach the covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 31, the so-called “new covenant,” a reference repeated in various places in the New Testament.

*Covenant Patterns in the New Covenant*

It is sometimes explained, particularly by Baptists, that this covenant is unique compared to all others, distinct in that it only pertains to believers and not necessarily their seed. It is distinct, they say, from the covenant made with Abraham and his seed. But if these things are so, we face the challenge as to what to do with the covenant

made with Abraham. What became of it? If it was merely a national covenant or a Jewish covenant, how do we explain Paul's teaching in Galatians 3 where he writes that God "preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed"? Or what about his teaching that the blessing of Abraham would come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ? Or that the covenant made with Abraham "was confirmed before, of God, in Christ so that the law which came four hundred and thirty years later could not make the promise to Abraham of no effect" (Gal. 3:17)? Recall also how the apostle refers to circumcision as the sign and seal of the righteousness of the faith which Abraham had. So then, we ask ourselves, is the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 *brand* new? The word "new" in the biblical languages doesn't always mean entirely new; it can also mean *renewed*. Was the Jeremiah 31 covenant brand new if it was established, as the passage clearly states, with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah? According to the book of Hebrews, the old covenant that was decaying and fading away was that which was made with Israel on Sinai, *not* that which God established with Abraham and his seed. So when Hebrews 12:24 tells us that New Testament believers are come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling, are we to believe that somehow Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, David, and other Old Testament saints came to God in another way? Not by way of faith in Christ, the covenant of grace? Our Lord told the Jewish leaders that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day and he saw it and was glad (John 8:56).

In the New Testament, then, we find a continuation of the pattern we've already seen. God's covenant continues to be with believers and their seed. God's covenant continues to be with His church. The signs of the covenant continued to be administered to the children of His people and to those brought into the church from without. Let us

see if we can trace these affirmations in the New Testament text.

As to the link between the covenant of Abraham and the New Testament church, we read that John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, prophesied that with the birth of Jesus, "God raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began... to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham." By God's Spirit, Zacharias prophesied that the covenant made with Abraham is linked to the salvation promised in Jesus the Messiah. It was this understanding that emboldened Peter, speaking by the Spirit on Pentecost, to say to the multitude of assembled Jews and proselytes, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," adding, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). The prophets had foretold of the expansion of God's covenant mercies to the Gentile nations, and hence Peter reflected this by saying that the promise will now be to as many as the Lord our God shall call. Peter pleads God's covenantal relationship with the seed of believers in his next recorded sermon, saying, "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 kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:25–26). Later on, Paul would write these memorable words concerning the Jews, "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your

sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Rom. 11:27–29).

Continued also is the Old Testament pattern of household circumcisions. When Lydia came to faith she was baptized, as was her household. When the jailor came to faith, he was baptized, as was his household. So too did Paul baptize the household of Stephanus.

That the children of believers should continue to receive the sign of their covenant relationship with God was clearly understood by the apostles. In Acts 21:20–24, Paul and James both affirm publicly that children of believing Jews ought not to be denied circumcision, which all Jews recognized as God's sign of covenantal inclusion. What about the children of believing Gentiles? James explicitly mentions *they* were strictly forbidden circumcision. Was there no sign to reflect their children's covenant relationship to God? Of course there was, that of baptism, the sign applied to the households of Gentile converts to Christianity. This would explain why Paul in Colossians 2 wrote of circumcision and baptism as if they were one and the same sign:

And ye are complete in him (i.e. Christ), which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out (i.e. with His blood) the handwriting of ordinances (laws) that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

So we find it has pleased God to establish His covenant with His people, a people sovereignly separated from

others to be His own. He declares to them that He would be their God and they His people. It has also pleased God to extend His covenant to the children of His people so that, as Psalm 78 tells us, we fathers would make God known to our children “that the generation to come might know him, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare it to their children: that they might set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”

But now, what does this all mean to us today? What exactly does baptism signify for the children being baptized? Is baptism mere symbolism or is it weightier than that?

## **2. Covenant Parameters with Believers and Their Seed**

With sadness we have seen that repeatedly in the Old Testament, the sign of circumcision, precious as it was, did not give grace to those who received it. Think of Ishmael, of Esau, or of so many Israelites. Yet it clearly was not meaningless to God, despite this reality. For an Israelite to deny one’s covenant relationship with God and covenant obligations was, to Him, a serious offence. God commanded all His people to obey His voice and did not make any allowances for those lacking true faith, demanding less of them. They were indeed a privileged people, set apart by God from all the rest. And He commanded them to reflect this distinctiveness in the way they interacted with the nations around them, with respect to marriage, making covenants with them, etc. They were to be a sanctified people, a people set apart for God.

This distinctiveness is also the same with respect to baptism and our children. Baptism does not automatically confer or give grace to the baptized child. Just as with circumcision, there are baptized children and adults who

sadly end up not exhibiting the fruits of a saving relationship with God. Think of Simon the sorcerer who, though baptized, and though he followed Philip for a while, was eventually told by Peter that his heart was not right in the sight of God and that Peter thought him to be in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. But regardless of our children's spiritual condition, baptism says to us as parents that these children, just like Israel's children, are God's children. They are to be brought up in His ways, giving honor to Him as their God, and are commanded to live as His people. They are not to resemble the children of the world in their life. They shall be judged more strictly by God than others will. To whom much is given, much will be required, "and that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47-48).

Is there any advantage to being a child of believing parents? Much in every way! Chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God. Having God's Word, hearing God's promises, being surrounded by godly influences—these advantages are immense. The New Testament speaks plainly about the sanctifying effect of believers on others, namely a believing spouse on his/her spouse and a believing parent on the children of the household (1 Cor. 7:14).

In Hebrews 10:29, after quoting Jeremiah 31 concerning the new covenant, Paul writes, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" None of us believe that true Christians can lose their salvation. Yet Paul, on the heels of mentioning the "new covenant" text, writes of how dreadful it is to be

sanctified by the blood of the covenant and yet to tread underfoot the Son of God whose blood it was that was shed, and to insult the Spirit of grace, the Spirit who takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Sorer punishment indeed, and rightly so!

In baptism we see encouragement. He is our God. We are His people. We see privileges, the blessings of being among God's people and under the regular witness of God's Word. We also see responsibilities. We all must live as His people, regardless of whether we are born again or not, and will be judged accordingly.

### **3. Covenant as a Pleading Ground for Believers and Their Seed**

Who can forget the poignant prayer of Abraham, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:18). Even though God would answer by affirming that His covenant would be with Isaac and his offspring, God did say to Abraham, "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." How many times did Moses plead God's covenant relationship with Israel when he knew Israel deserved the wrath of God, saying, "Why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?" (Ex. 32:11). Even when the Lord in His wrath would say to Moses that Israel was the people that he, Moses, led forth from Egypt, the man of God would invariably reply that it was God's people that He led to freedom: "They are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm" (Deut. 9:29). Hear the prophet Jeremiah plead in like manner: "Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory:

remember, break not thy covenant with us” (Jer. 14:21). Even when God chided Israel for being covenant breakers, He did not therefore renounce His covenant with them: “For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant” (Ezek. 16:59–60). This was Peter’s point in mentioning God’s covenant to the people right after Pentecost: “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 kindreds of the earth be blessed.” In other words, let us be encouraged and plead God’s covenant mercies, since we cannot plead anything about ourselves, being the betrayers and murderers of the Messiah Himself!

Baptism says much to us, also today, beloved. It speaks to the whole congregation, “I am the LORD thy God. It speaks to all believers, being a sign and seal of the righteousness of Christ which we have by faith. It speaks to parents: “These are God’s children. Rear them that way” It speaks to children: “This is your God. Love, honor, and obey Him.” And it also speaks of Jesus Christ, whose blood is our covenant pleading ground. Amen.