

What is the status or the condition of the child of a believer? How is such a child different from the rest of the children of the world? Why should the child from a Christian home be baptized? Children of believing parents are born in sin just like the rest of the children of Adam. Children of believing parents often commit the same horrible sins as other children and demonstrate no evidence of saving grace. Many children from Christian homes grow up and end up leaving the faith of their parents; in fact, some of them live more like the devil than many who have never had such an upbringing. Do you recall what Christ said of Judas Iscariot, a former covenant child in Matthew 26:24, “The Son of Man goes as it was written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

The difference between the children of the covenant and the children of the world boils down simply to this: The covenant child ( i.e. a child either born or adopted into the home of at least one believing parent) is singularly set apart by God to have the privilege of being offered the gospel along with all of the benefits of salvation. If a child in a so-called covenant home, is not offered the gospel, and is not taught the gospel, and does not have the gospel lived out before them, then that child is no different than the rest of the children of the world. *Therefore, if you want to honor the distinction that God has placed between your covenant child and the children of the world, then you must evangelize your children. If you want to honor the distinction that God has placed between your covenant child and the children of the world, then you must evangelize your children.*

The apostle Paul spoke of the gospel, in Romans 1:16, as the power of God unto salvation. It is the gospel that transforms your home into a covenant home, your marriage into a God-honoring covenant marriage, and your child into a covenant child. It is the good news of the gospel that will have the greatest impact upon the *life* of your child. *Therefore, evangelize your children in order that you might have a sanctifying influence upon their life. Evangelize your children in order that you might have a sanctifying influence upon their life.*

Notice from our passage, the powerful influence that even one believing family member can have upon the rest of the members of that family. In 1 Corinthians 7:14, the apostle Paul wrote “for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.”

Paul was here dealing with a situation that often results from the evangelization of families. It is not uncommon for certain members of a family to embrace the gospel and to come to a saving knowledge of the truth, while the others remain in their unbelief. Some husbands believe and not their wives, some wives believe and not their husbands, some children believe and not their parents, and vice versa. But this does not mean that there is not yet still hope for those family members who are still unbelieving.

On the contrary, there is much greater hope for the salvation of an unbelieving family member in a covenant home than there is for the person who is entirely without this Christian influence. Because of the close marital bond that God has established, Paul

maintained that the unbelieving spouse “is sanctified” by the believing spouse, and thus, the unbelieving spouse is viewed and treated differently by God.

Now it is of the utmost importance to understand the meaning of the word “sanctified” as it is used in our passage. The Greek verb *hagiazō* can be understood in a variety of ways depending on the context in which it is employed. But in most cases the word simply means “to set apart,” and thus, to view or treat differently, i.e., with reverence, since it is usually God Himself who does the sanctifying and who determines what should be considered holy or sanctified or set apart by Him.

In the Bible, there are holy days, holy places (such as the tabernacle or even the ground upon which Moses and Joshua took off their sandals), holy objects or vessels (such as the utensils which had been consecrated in service to God), holy food, holy people, holy commandments, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is the essential holiness of God Himself, as well as the personal holiness of the believer produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit. In all of these instances there is a setting apart that takes place.

In our passage before us, the apostle Paul is asserting the particular status of a person as being “sanctified” based upon his or her association with God Himself. This status comes about by virtue of the covenantal relationship that God has established with His people. Peter referred to the people of God as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a *holy nation*,” in 1 Peter 2:9. This idea was not new to the covenant people: Peter borrowed this language from Exodus 19:5-6, where Moses likewise called the members of the

collective visible church at that time “a *holy* nation.” This obviously did not mean that all those members in covenant with God were renewed in their hearts by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. Rather, they were set apart by God from the rest of the unbelieving world. And that is essentially the meaning of “sanctified” in our verse.

Paul used the verb *hagiazō* in the perfect tense which denotes a completed action in the past with an ongoing result. Thus, the unbelieving spouse *had been sanctified* at a particular time in the past, and this status would continue so long as the marriage relationship remained intact. The apostle was maintaining that a new covenantal relationship had taken place between the family under consideration and God Himself, seeing that one party in the marriage had professed faith in Christ and joined the church.

Therefore, Paul was not *only* saying that the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever was a valid marriage under these circumstances, i.e. one married partner becoming converted after marriage, but he was also saying that the unbelieving spouse was set apart in a unique way from the rest of the unbelieving world. Even though the unbelieving spouse was not a member of the church, nor *personally* in a covenantal relationship with God, he or she had, in a sense, been sanctified through the marriage relationship.

The systematic theologian Charles Hodge is very helpful here, when he maintains that the unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the “intimate union with a believer, just as the temple sanctified the gold connected with it; or the altar the gift [that was] laid upon it,” and then he cites Matt. 23:17 and 19, where Jesus addressed the Scribes and Pharisees with

these words, “You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?” “You blind men! For which is greater, the gift [i.e. the gift of an animal sacrifice] or the altar that makes the gift sacred?” In these verses, Jesus acknowledged that the sacrificial animal and even the gold became sanctified or set apart when they came in contact with the sacred temple.

Hodge goes on to assert that, “the pagan husband, in virtue of his union with a Christian wife, although he remained a pagan, was sanctified; he assumed a *new* relation; he was set apart to the service of God, as the guardian of one of [God’s] chosen ones [i.e. his wife], and as the parent of children who, in virtue of their believing mother, were children of the covenant,” end quote.

Now, Paul based his assertion of the nature of this marriage relationship upon what he assumed his readers already knew, the child of a believing parent was not unclean, but clean, and therefore holy. When you think of the word “clean” in the Bible, it should conjure up some images in your mind, especially with regard to God’s dealings with his people in the Old Testament. The distinction between that which was clean and that which was unclean or common was constantly placed before the covenant people of God. For that holy nation was to be a separate people, clearly distinguishable from the people and the practises of the rest of the world, and this was symbolized, in part, by a ceremonial cleanness.

Only that which was clean was allowed inside the camp of the Israelite people. The people were to eat only clean animals. A person who had a skin disease, which many of our English translations render as leprosy, was to announce his uncleanness, and his dwelling was to be outside the camp until his skin disease went away. A priest could enter into the sanctuary and minister on behalf of the people only if he was first ceremonially clean. Many of the temple furnishings were overlaid with *pure* or *clean* gold; that word for pure is the very same word for clean translated elsewhere. Therefore, the dwelling place of God and His people was to be a place of ceremonial cleanness. All the unbelieving, all those who were not members of that holy nation, were considered unclean.

Thus, the notion that a covenant child was clean was nothing new. This was how God viewed the children of His covenant people in the Old Testament, and this was how the parents were taught to treat their children, i.e. as members of the Old Testament Church. As such, all covenant children were given the sign of church membership, when they were circumcised on the eighth day.

Now, I would point out to you, in the passage before us, that the apostle Paul did *not* refer to the unbelieving spouse as clean, only the covenant child. Would he have been willing to do so? I'm not quite so sure. I think that the apostle saw a difference between the unbelieving spouse who had been sanctified by the marriage relationship and the covenant child who was clean, and as such, considered to be a member of God's visible church.

It must be kept in mind that the apostle Paul was making an argument from the greater to the lesser. The greater being the assumed status of the covenant child, the lesser being the status of the unbelieving spouse. Although Paul was writing primarily about the marriage relationship, he was using a truth universally understood by the covenant people of God when he spoke of the status of the covenant child as a matter of fact.

*If* the marital relationship of the believer and unbeliever has not been sanctified by God, if it has not been constituted by God as a covenant family, then the child would be considered unclean, and therefore, not a member of the church. But since we know that the child of a believing parent is in fact clean, and thus a member, it must be maintained that God has sanctified this marital union.

Furthermore, a distinction must be made here between children and adults, just as it was in the Old Testament. Children were considered clean and therefore members of the Old Testament Church by virtue of their birth into that covenant community, but adults coming into the community were admitted as members only after a profession of faith. The children were required later to profess their faith and confirm their interest in the things of God before they would be admitted into all of the privileges of membership, such as partaking of the Passover meal; this we see even Jesus doing at the age of 12 in Luke 2:41-51.

Therefore, we would disagree with some of our Baptist brothers who argue that the believing spouse is *simply* having a sanctifying influence upon the unbelieving spouse and

*simply* having a sanctifying influence upon the child. Rather, we would hold that a change of status has taken place. The moment the believing spouse made a profession of faith, the child was considered clean and therefore accepted as a member of the church, and the unbelieving spouse had been sanctified by virtue of the marital union.

However, there is *also* no doubt that this change of status allowed for a greater sanctifying influence to take place within the family. And this is how God typically chooses to work by His grace in the lives of His people.

In the Old Testament, God called His people out of Egypt and *first* established them as a holy nation, and *then* called them to pursue personal holiness. The holy law of God was thundered forth as a standard for holy living. But the gospel was also declared to the people audibly through Moses' preaching, and visibly in circumcision, in the Passover, and in the animal sacrifices, especially on the Day of Atonement. The sacrifices helped the people to see their sinfulness and their need of a Savior depicted in the sacrificial lamb. Therefore, the gospel was preached to the people through those means, albeit in a typical and shadowy form.

But the fact that the people were *God's* people, the fact that they were ceremonially clean and set apart as a *holy* people, did not mean that they were ultimately saved. Rather, their status as God's covenant people brought them into contact with the gospel and with the means of grace God had ordained to truly sanctify the people.

Your situation is no different. You have been brought into the visible church, just like the people of God in the Old Testament era were. You need to hear the gospel, just like they did. You need to be continually reminded of your sinfulness just like they were; not so that you feel condemned by your sins, but so that you will be continually reminded to look to Christ alone for salvation. And if *you* need to be continuously reminded of the gospel, how important is it that your covenant children continually hear the good news of the gospel as well. Therefore, evangelize your children, *for it will* have a sanctifying influence upon them.

It is a wonderful privilege for your children to be included into the membership of God's covenant people. It means they are exposed to and made recipients of the means of grace God has given to His church. It means that from their earliest days they are offered the benefits of salvation, which are symbolized in the covenant sign and seal of baptism.

Baptism is a mighty sacrament, a powerful means of grace; it points the child to Christ and offers Christ to them in a way that the unbelieving world knows nothing of. But the waters of baptism are only a sign and seal of saving grace, not the substance, and thus, do not secure their salvation. The sacrament of baptism does not accomplish anything in and of itself without the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who receive it. *Therefore, evangelize your children not only in order that you might have a sanctifying influence upon them, but also in order to secure the benefits of their baptism. Evangelize your children in order to secure the benefits of their baptism.*

I once heard a Reformed Baptist minister say that there is not one drop of water in this passage of 1 Corinthians 7:14. Therefore, he argued, you cannot prove infant baptism from this text. Well, I would agree with him. You cannot prove that the child of a believer should receive the sign and seal of baptism from this text alone. But I would be hesitant to prove any doctrine of Scripture upon one isolated text. All of the teaching of the Word of God must be taken into consideration when seeking to understand any doctrine of the Bible.

That being said however, there is more to this passage than meets the undiscerning eye. We have already seen that for something or someone to be declared clean in the Old Testament was an indication of acceptance in God's sanctified community. But there was also a close affiliation between that which was clean and the cleansing rituals that took place in the covenant community.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews actually called these cleansing rituals "washings," or literally in the Greek "baptisms," in Hebrews 9:10. He also referred to these baptisms as taking place by sprinkling in verse 13. Many of these baptisms, as one might expect, are found in the book of Leviticus, where the importance of discerning the clean from the unclean is strongly emphasized. The laws concerning cleanness and uncleanness are predominantly focused in Leviticus chapters 11-15, but I would like to give you just a couple of examples of the cleansing rituals from Leviticus 14.

In chapter 14 we are taught that if a person in the covenant community had a skin disease, he was to be examined by the priest to see if he was leprous. That person, if need be, was quarantined for a period of time, to see if the skin disease would go away. Eventually, the person would be declared either clean or unclean. If the person was declared unclean, and therefore leprous, then he was required to dwell outside the camp; he remained unclean until the disease went away. If the skin disease cleared up, he was declared clean and then underwent a cleansing ritual by being sprinkled with water.

We are taught in another instance, that if a house in the covenant community had a disease (which probably meant that it had some kind of mold, mildew, or fungus) then that house was also to be examined by the priest. After a designated period of time, if the disease in the home did not clear up, then it was condemned; if it did clear up, then the priest declared the home clean and he performed a cleansing ritual upon the house by sprinkling it with water. Again, both of these cleansing rituals the author of Hebrews calls baptisms. Therefore, we can see even here, how these cleansing rituals, although a shadow and a type, were pointing forward to the New Testament rite of Christian baptism.

In these two instances, it is evident that there was a correlation between that which was already ceremonially clean and the baptisms which symbolized and confirmed that condition. In a similar manner, we do not present our children to be baptized in order that they might actually be cleansed, as if the waters accomplished such cleansing, but rather to symbolize, confirm, and announce that the child is already ceremonially clean, as it were.

The child has already been set apart by God and belongs to him. All children born to or adopted by a believing parent or parents is a covenant child, whether the parents recognize them to be such or not, and whether they give them the covenant sign of baptism or not.

However, the waters of baptism do symbolize the realization that the child needs to be cleansed inwardly, i.e. of his or her sin. Such cleansing, the apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 3:21, does not come about from the removal of dirt from the flesh, i.e. by the ceremonial rite of baptism, *but* by the appeal of the *conscience* which has been sprinkled clean through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:22).

Just as Moses told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 10:16, that they needed to receive the reality of the Old Testament sign and seal of circumcision, i.e. the circumcision of their hearts, so our children need to be reminded that they need to receive the reality of the sign and seal of baptism, i.e. the washing and cleansing of *their hearts*. If the benefits of salvation offered in the sacrament of baptism are going to be secured by the recipient, the Spirit of God must first sovereignly regenerate the heart in His own good time.

Listen to a section from the Westminster Confession of Faith on this doctrine of baptism: “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Spirit, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will in His appointed time,” end quote.

Thus, the benefits of salvation offered in the sacrament of baptism can only be secured if the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit produces such benefits in the heart. However, the Holy Spirit does not produce such benefits through water baptism, but ordinarily regenerates the heart and grants the gift of saving faith through the preaching, the teaching, and the instruction of the Word of God. *Therefore, finally, evangelize your children not only in order to have a sanctifying influence upon them, not only in order to secure the benefits of their baptism, but also and ultimately in order to save them. Evangelize your children in order to save them.*

The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:23 reminds us that we have been born again, not by baptism, but *by the living and abiding word of God*. James, in a similar fashion, in James 1:18 writes that we were brought forth, not by water, but *by the word of truth*. The apostle Paul declares in Romans 10:17, that faith comes, not from a sacrament, but “from *hearing the word of Christ*.”

Now I don't want you to misunderstand me. I am not saying that you should assume your children are unbelievers until proven otherwise. A covenant child can be born from above while a young infant or even while in the womb (such my have been the case with King David and certainly was the case with John the Baptist). They may also become regenerate much later in life, even after a life of great wickedness and shame; such was the case with King Manasseh.

But I don't think it is wise to presume that your child is regenerate by virtue of the fact that he or she has been born or adopted into a covenant family. There are some Reformed theologians who hold to a view known as presumptive regeneration, which is the idea that you should presume your child is regenerate and a true believer until proven otherwise, not because they have been baptized, but because of God's general promise in Scripture to save covenant children.

But we have to remember that God's promise to be a God to us and to our children, found in places like Genesis 17:7 and Acts 2:39, is a general promise and not a particular one. It does not apply to every child born into a covenant home. There are Cain's as well as Abel's, Ishmael's as well as Isaac's, Esau's as well as Jacob's, and there are Judas' as well as John's. Therefore, you should assume nothing, nothing other than that it is your duty to evangelize your children. It is your duty to live a godly example before them. It is your duty to pray with and for them daily. It is your duty to teach and instruct them, and especially to place them under the regular preaching of the Word of God.

Not only is the doctrine of presumptive regeneration unsupported by the Word of God, but it also unnecessarily cultivates a spirit of idleness and complacency in regard to your child's salvation. Such an unBiblical view will not encourage you to evangelize your children and to bring the claims of Christ upon their lives.

You must urge your children to place their faith, their hope, their trust, not in their status as a covenant child, nor in their church membership, nor in their baptism, but in

Christ alone. They must be taught to lay hold of Christ with their own hand, not the hand of their parents.

What could you possibly count more dear unto yourself than the salvation of your children? Can you think of anything more dreadful in this life than to know that your child is separated from Christ and will go into eternal perdition? And what is there that could bring you more joy than to know that your child is safe in the arms of the Redeemer, and will be with you forever in eternal glory?

Far too often, parents are too preoccupied with their child's personal happiness, or with their child's socialization, or with their child's education, and not with their child's salvation. There are countless covenant children who were at one time holy and happy and now they are in hell. It is by far your greatest duty and the greatest privilege you will ever have as a parent to lead your little ones to Christ. Therefore, point your children to Christ, evangelize them, and by doing so, you may actually save them.