

## **Infant Baptism & Baby Dedication**

Within the Reformed tradition – which we at Grace Christian Fellowship certainly subscribe to - you will find two main views concerning baptism. In the Presbyterian tradition you will find as the norm the practice of paedobaptism – the baptism of infants. Their understanding of infant baptism has gotten a bad rap from the evangelical church that practices believer's baptism, because they confuse the Presbyterian view with the Roman Catholic view.

This Reformed view is never to be confused with the Roman view of infant baptism, because the Roman church teaches that infant baptism saves or regenerates the baby by infusing saving grace into the soul of the infant, which in turn washes away original sin without any faith on the part of the baby.

Presbyterian infant baptism has to do with God's covenant relationship with Christian families, and as you will see, we at Grace are certainly sympathetic to this understanding.

The second Reformed tradition is found in your Reformed Baptist congregations, which teach that baptism is a sign that one has come to faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, baptism is for those young people and older who have an understanding of their salvation and are publicly professing their faith before the Lord and the congregation. As they are immersed they are illustrating their death, burial and resurrection as a new creature in Christ, which has come to them by faith through grace. This is called credo-baptism.

Although we at Grace Christian Fellowship are sensitive to the covenantal aspects of the Presbyterian infant baptism, we subscribe to adult or believer's baptism.

The foundation of all of God's dealings with man is the covenant. It is the basis of all that God has done, is doing, and will do in time and on earth. Nothing can be understood rightly apart from an understanding of God's covenant.

In general: The covenant is the means by which man has communion with God. It is a living bond between God and man wherein God pledges to be our God and claims us to be His people. The common formula by which God describes this relationship is, "I will be your God and you will be my people."

When God comes to Abraham, He declares this very thing. We read in Genesis 17:7-9: "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."

We see here that God's covenant promise is for Abraham and his descendents – so God's covenant promises are extended to the family members of believers. Does being raised in a Christian home and being baptized or dedicated as an infant guarantee a child's salvation?

Not necessarily; we know from Romans that not all that are of Abraham are truly Israel. Only those who have had their hearts circumcised – in other words – have come to faith in Jesus Christ – only they are the true children of Abraham. Remember that Ishmael – a son of Abraham - was not a child of the promise, and neither was Abraham's grandson Esau.

But I believe it is still correct to say that the children of believers receive unique blessings from the Lord because they are under the covenant of Grace that the believing parents are under and are enjoying. 1 Corinthians 7:14 speaks of the children of Christian parents being seen by the Lord as clean or sanctified – not saved – but set apart – in order that they may receive the favor and blessings of the Lord God.

The Church is the community of the covenant; and the preaching of the Word, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the fellowship and mutual care and encouragements are all signs, seals, tokens, expressions, and instruments of the covenant, through which God grants covenant mercies to His people. The hope of glory is the ultimate realization of the covenant relationship.

The Bible is the Book of the covenant and the record of history is the story of the outworking of God's covenant purpose. Nothing is understood rightly apart from an understanding of the covenant. Jesus is our Savior because He is the Mediator of the Covenant. The gospel promises are invitations to enter and enjoy a covenant relationship with God. Faith is nothing more than embracing the covenant. The Christian life is in its essence, the sinner enjoying covenant communion with His Savior.

At Grace Christian Fellowship we believe that children of believers have a special place in the Covenant Community. We read in Psalm 127:3 'Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him.' And then Jesus said in Matthew 19:14 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Children are indeed special gifts from the Lord and are highly valued by Him. The Lord God certainly saves His elect as individuals – one at a time – but little children are a part of something bigger – the family – and the family is to be a part of something bigger – the local church or covenant community – and the covenant community at Grace Christian is a part of something even bigger – the universal church of Jesus Christ – the Body of Christ.

At Grace Christian Fellowship we recognize the importance of presenting our children to the Lord before the family of God. In some churches this ceremony is called a dedication service: The parents are in essence saying to the Lord: 'We understand Lord, that our child has been given to us by You as a precious gift, but we recognize our inability to raise this child as You would ultimately desire, so we present our children to You and ask that You would bless, protect, provide for, and save our child - and guide and lead us as parents to raise them in a home that is pleasing to You and glorifies Your name.

That's beautiful and we subscribe to that understanding. At Grace we take it a small step further by recognizing the importance of what I have just explained concerning our covenant relationship with the Lord. At birth the children of believers are now a part of the covenant community of the local church; and in our baby dedication ceremony we are cognitively and publicly acknowledging this belief in order to encourage the parents and the church that God is with our children.