

Parent-Child Dedication:**Towards a Theology of Children**

Whether biological or adopted, all children belong to God and are given to parents as gifts and signs of blessing (Genesis 30:20; Psalm 127:3 NIV 2011). God has created children crowned with glory and honour (Psalm 8:4-5) and, providentially, children are sources of joy and pleasure (Luke 1:14; John 16:21). Evidently, even before birth, God has intimately and personally known every child (Psalm 139:15-16; Jeremiah. 1:5). Each child, regardless of race, gender, or class, possesses the full value and dignity of personhood because God made humankind in His own image (Genesis 1:27; 5:1-2); and, although fallen by nature, that image is disfigured not lost (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9).

However, children are sinful from childhood (Genesis 8:21) because they are born with a sinful nature (Job 25:4; Psalm 51:5; 58:3) inherited from their parents (Romans 5:12). Also, "as surely as sparks fly upwards, so man is born into trouble" (Job 5:7). Therefore parents are to train children (Proverbs 22:6) and nurture them in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) teaching them about God's character (Isaiah 38:10), His works (Psalm 78:4), and His word (Deuteronomy 11:18-19; 31:12-13). Jesus identified with children (Matthew 18:2-5) and welcomed them (Matthew 19:14). God created each child to glorify Himself (Isaiah 43:7; Romans 11:36). Therefore, most importantly, parents and church ought to teach children the gospel so that they may be saved and progressively recover more and more of God's image in Christ Jesus (Colossians 3:10; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18) until that day of complete restoration when all believers will bear the image of Christ perfectly (1 Corinthians 15:49; 1 John 3:2).

God's purpose for creating humanity in His own image was perfectly realized in the person of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:5). Therefore the incarnation of Christ, the God-man, hallows the human experience of the unborn, the infant, the toddler, the adolescent, and the young person. Jesus has identified with all children insofar as he grew up physically and intellectually (Luke 2:40), emotionally (John 11:35; Hebrews 5:7), obediently (Hebrews 5:8), and spiritually from infancy through childhood to adulthood (Luke 2:40, 52).

Rationale

We do not practice infant baptism (because we believe, biblically, candidates for water baptism are those who have professed faith in Christ for salvation). Nor have we practiced "baby dedication" as though it is simply a "dry baptism," a low church alternative to a high church sacrament for infants. But it has been our simple tradition to honour God's design for family through the practice of "Parent-child" dedications. In other words, we are capitalizing on this opportunity as a church family to publicly promise our support and encouragement to mothers and fathers who will dedicate and raise their child(ren) for the glory of God. Also, we pause to pray to God for saving grace (for the child) and the wisdom of parental guidance (for the Dad

and/or Mom). So the purpose of a parent-child dedication is to formalize the partnership between the parents and their church family in the conservation of our Christian faith. Accordingly, Parent-child dedications are an important aspect of pastoral care in our congregation. An arranged pastoral visit with each family in their home will prepare them for the ceremony and much more.

Conducting the Brief Ceremony

Ideally, on the day of dedication, meet with the parents a few minutes before the service in order to explain where they should stand. Keep in mind that babies and toddlers are unpredictable – some may sleep through everything, others have short attention spans and may disrupt. I suggest the ceremony last a few minutes. One or two Elders will stand central in front of the pulpit and introduce the family (or families) who come forward. Flexibility is fitting in terms of precisely how the Parent-child dedication takes shape. I suggest the following: acknowledge any other children who come up with their parents; memorize the full name of the child to be prayed over; acknowledge the presence of family members (the cheering section) especially Grandparents (Proverbs 17:6); read Scripture; lead the congregation through the written pledge in the bulletin; and pray for the family.

Resources:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9	Mark 10:13-16
1 Samuel 1:21-28	Luke 2:22, 40, 52
Psalm 78:1-8	Ephesians 6:4
Psalm 127:1, 3	Colossians 3:21
Proverbs 1:7-9	Titus 2:4
Proverbs 22:6	2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-17
Ecclesiastes 12:1-5	3 John 4

Hymn: "Because He Lives"

How sweet to hold a new born baby,
 And feel the pride, and joy he gives;
 But greater still the calm assurance,
 This child can face uncertain days because He (Christ) lives.

Hymn: "A Christian Home"

O give us homes built firm upon the Saviour,
 Where Christ is Head and Counsellor and Guide,
 Where every child is taught His love and Favour
 And gives his heart to Christ, the crucified.

"Baby Dedication" Certificates

Bill has these certificates in stock to commemorate the occasion.
 All that's required to fill them out is the full name of the child,
 the date of the ceremony, and signatures.