

"The Great Privileges of Covenant Children"
(Romans 9:3-5)

Introduction: Many of you here this morning have children whom the Lord has blessed you with, and some of you have very many children. Many of you, if you don't have children that you are raising, have grandchildren that your children are raising. And I am sure that each one of you love your children very very much. And because you love them, you want the very best for them. You want to see them walk with the Lord, to love Him and to embrace Him as their own personal Lord and Savior, and to serve Him with all of their hearts for all of their lives. You know that that is the most important thing that they could ever do in this world. Everything else is as nothing next to this, for this is for their everlasting good and safety.

But you are also aware this morning, that there are many things in the world which can tempt your children away from the Lord. In our age, our society seems to be more given over to the power of the devil than it was in other times not long past. Sins of all kinds are being exalted today in our society, sins which may attract us or our children. Some are more subtle, so that we don't realize the dangers involved with them at first, and others are more blatant, and we try to avoid them. But our minds and the minds of our children are constantly being bombarded with worldliness. And if you are not careful, you will lose yourself and your children to it. Donna and I have recently been counselling a couple who have lost their daughter to one of Satan's snares. Growing up, she was very compliant and close to her parents; she seemed to love the Lord and was always in the Scriptures seeking to find out what His will for her life was. Recently she met a young man who claimed to be a Christian, who was very worldly. She began to become involved with him and with his friends. Some of his friends were the daughters of the pastor whose church they attended who also were very worldly. The result is that she rebelled against her parents. They saw what this relationship was doing to her, and they tried to get her to break off her relationship with this young man. They were crushed to find out that she was recently caught in her college dormitory, at a Christian College, no less, in the very act of sexual promiscuity, and she was subsequently expelled from the college. She now fully intends to marry this man who has led her away from the Lord, taken her virginity, and ruined her opportunity to receive a Christian education. Parents, these dangers are very real. Satan is trying to do everything that is in his power to get your children to follow his paths. If you don't believe me, just turn on the television set on Saturday morning and see what kind of rebellion it is planting in the minds of our youth. If this doesn't strike fear in your heart, it should! All of us are liable to losing our children to the world; some of us already have. But the important question that we need to ask is, What can we do to prevent this? What has the Lord given to us to combat the power of the enemy and to help our children avoid the snare of the devil?

Obviously, those who are raising their children in the world have little that they can do. Really, all they can tell their children is, "Just Say No!", something that is within the power of the child to do, but yet not within his heart. But those of you who are raising your children in the covenant community of God have many advantages, if only you will use them diligently.

What we are beginning this morning is a series on the covenant nurture of our children. And I hope that we will have the chance to take a good look at what we as parents can do to minister Christ to our little ones. This morning, I would like for us to look at the very broad principle that,

Your children are included in the covenant community of God, and for that reason they have many advantages which those in the world do not.

First, we will look briefly at the fact that our children are included in God's gracious covenant; and secondly, what the advantages are which they have in that covenant.

I. *The Bible Clearly Reveals that the Children of Believers Are Included in God's Covenant Community.*

I say that it is clear, although there are many of our Baptist brethren who do not believe this. But this is true because:

A. *God Has Always Included the Entire Household in His Dealings with Man, Whether for Blessing or for Judgment.*

1. God dealt not only with Adam and his wife, but also with their children: Cain and Abel. They both brought sacrifices to God, and God communicated with them.
2. When God was bringing judgment on the world because of the sin of its inhabitants, He chose to save Noah, for he alone found favor in God's sight. But God not only saved Noah, He saved Noah and his whole family.
3. When God chose Abram to make a gracious covenant with him and gave to him the covenant sign of circumcision, he was not the only one who receive it, but also his entire household, showing that they were all included.
4. This same thing holds true with regard to the judgment of God.
 - a. When Ham sinned against Noah by telling his brothers of his father's drunken nakedness, he brought down the curse of his father not only on his own head, but especially upon his son Canaan.
 - b. When Achan stole some articles from the city of Jericho, which God had absolutely forbidden, not only Achan was stoned, but also his whole household, including his wife and children.
 - c. And when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against the Lord and sought to intrude into the priestly office, their whole households, including their children and their infants, were swallowed alive into Sheol.
 - d. God did not deal simply with individuals, but with whole households.

B. *And There Is Nothing in the New Testament Which Would Tell Us That It Is Now Any Different, but Many Things Which Tell Us that It Is the Same.*

1. When the Lord saved Cornelius, his whole household also believed and was baptized.
2. When the Lord opened Lydia's heart, and the heart of the Philippian jailer, their whole household was baptized, not just themselves.
3. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:14 that the children of believers are set apart to the Lord, "FOR THE UNBELIEVING HUSBAND IS SANCTIFIED THROUGH HIS WIFE, AND THE UNBELIEVING WIFE IS SANCTIFIED THROUGH HER BELIEVING HUSBAND; FOR OTHERWISE YOUR CHILDREN ARE UNCLEAN, BUT NOW THEY ARE HOLY."
4. Jesus said, "PERMIT THE CHILDREN TO COME TO ME, AND DO NOT HINDER THEM, FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO SUCH AS THESE" (Luke 18:16).

5. In the New Covenant, God is still dealing with whole households, and for that reason, your children are still included in the covenant.

II. And Because They Are Included in the Covenant, There Are Several Distinct Advantages Which Our Children Have Which Unbelievers Do Not.

A. Paul, in Our Passage, Is Telling Us What Advantages the Jews and Their Seed Had in the Old Covenant.

1. First of all, they were Israelites. They were the people of God who were descended from Jacob. Remember, Jacob wrestled with the angel and said to him, "I WILL NOT LET YOU GO UNLESS YOU BLESS ME." And the angel responded, "'WHAT IS YOUR NAME?' AND HE SAID, 'JACOB.' AND HE SAID, 'YOUR NAME SHALL NO LONGER BE JACOB, BUT ISRAEL [which means "he who strives with God"]; FOR YOU HAVE STRIVEN WITH GOD AND WITH MEN AND HAVE PREVAILED'" (Gen. 32:26-28). This blessing, as we have already seen, would pertain to Jacob and to his seed.
2. Secondly, they had received the adoption as sons. They were that nation which God had set aside to be His children, His sons by adoption. God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, when he went to deliver the sons of Israel out of bondage, "THUS SAYS THE LORD, 'ISRAEL IS MY SON, MY FIRST-BORN'" (Ex. 4:22). This was the adoption into the covenant, which was not necessarily saving, but a great blessing.
3. Third, they had the glorious presence of God in their midst. God dwelt among the Jews in a very special way, and He revealed Himself in the shining cloud of glory, called the Shekinah. After Moses had built the Tabernacle, the Scripture says, "THEN THE CLOUD COVERED THE TENT OF MEETING, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD FILLED THE TABERNACLE. AND MOSES WAS NOT ABLE TO ENTER THE TENT OF MEETING BECAUSE THE CLOUD HAD SETTLED ON IT, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD FILLED THE TABERNACLE" (Ex. 40:34-35).
4. Fourth, they were the ones who possessed the gracious covenants. These were those gracious agreements which God had made with Israel. They were saving covenants. And whether an Israelite was one of the elect or not, having the covenants guaranteed to them innumerable blessings and privileges.
5. Fifth, they were given the holy Law of God. Paul says in Romans 3:1-2, "THEN WHAT ADVANTAGE HAS THE JEW? OR WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF CIRCUMCISION? GREAT IN EVERY RESPECT. FIRST OF ALL, THAT THEY WERE ENTRUSTED WITH THE ORACLES OF GOD." The Law of God is that perfect revelation of His will. It shows His people how to love and serve Him. And it promised great blessing to them. Moses told the Israelites, "NOW IT SHALL BE, IF YOU WILL DILIGENTLY OBEY THE LORD YOUR GOD, BEING CAREFUL TO DO ALL HIS COMMANDMENTS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY, THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL SET YOU HIGH ABOVE ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH. AND ALL THESE BLESSINGS SHALL COME UPON YOU AND OVERTAKE YOU, IF YOU WILL OBEY THE LORD YOUR GOD" (Deu. 28:1-2).
6. Sixth, to them belonged the temple service. To them belonged the ordinances of God of how He was to be worshiped, as well the right to come before Him. And we must not forget that in that service they saw many types and pictures of the coming Messiah who was to remove their sins and bring to them everlasting salvation.
7. Seventh, to them the gracious promises were given. The promises were included in the covenants. They had to do with Christ and

His coming kingdom. These were the promises originally spoken to Abraham and passed on to the successive generations of Israelites, "NOW THE PROMISES WERE SPOKEN TO ABRAHAM AND TO HIS SEED" (Gal. 3:16).

8. Eighth, they were the direct descendants of men who were very highly favored by God. The Jews all came from the loins of Abraham, who was called the friend of God (James 2:23), Isaac, who was the child of promise, and Jacob, who had striven with God and man and had prevailed (Gen. 32:28).
9. And lastly, they were the community out of which the Christ came and to which He was first sent to turn them away from their sins.
10. The Jews had many precious blessings and advantages.

B. But These Blessings of the Covenant Were Not Only for the Jews of the Old Covenant, They Are Also for Us and for Our Children in the New.

1. We must never forget that all of the covenants of God are based upon the one gracious covenant of Grace.
2. The New Covenant is nothing more than the fulfillment of all of God's covenants, and therefore we should expect that these same blessings are for us and our children now.

III. Uses. And so what difference does this make to us, and what does this call us to with regard to our children that they might walk with the Lord and not be lost with the rest of the world? It calls upon us to use these gracious means diligently on our children's behalf that they might be saved.

A. First, You Must Let Them Know of Their Adoption into God's Covenant and of Their Responsibilities.

1. Our children are included in the New Covenant of God, even as the Israelite children were in the Old.
2. For this reason, your children were given the New Covenant sign of baptism, which calls them to separate themselves from the world and sin and to live unto the Lord.
3. For this reason too, when you had them baptized, you made a vow before God and before many witnesses: DO YOU PROMISE TO INSTRUCT YOUR CHILDREN IN THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR HOLY RELIGION AS REVEALED IN THE SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS, AND AS SUMMARIZED IN THE CONFSSION OF FAITH AND CATECHISMS OF THIS CHURCH; AND DO YOU PROMISE TO PRAY WITH AND FOR YOUR CHILD, TO SET AN EXAMPLE OF PIETY AND GODLINESS BEFORE HIM, AND TO ENDEAVOR BY ALL THE MEANS OF GOD'S APPOINTMENT TO BRING HIM UP IN THE NURTURE AND ADMONITION OF THE LORD?" (DW IV:B:4).
4. Now is a good time to examine yourselves and see if you have kept this vow or not. Have you been teaching them and instructing them the principles of our holy religion? Have you been praying for your children, and setting an example of godliness before them? Have you been diligently using the means of grace to bring them to faith and repentance in Christ? This is your responsibility before the Lord, and apart from this you cannot expect that they will be saved.

B. Second, You Must Be Godly Yourself, so that They Will See the Glory of Christ Shining Forth from Your Lives.

1. The presence of God no longer dwells in Temples made with hands,

but in the lives of His people. Paul says, "DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE A TEMPLE OF GOD, AND THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU? (1 Cor. 3:16).

2. You who are Christians here this morning, who have God's Spirit dwelling in you, are the living temple of God. It is from you that His glory is to shine forth. The Scripture says, "BUT WE ALL, WITH UNVEILED FACE BEHOLDING AS IN A MIRROR THE GLORY OF THE LORD, ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO THE SAME IMAGE FROM GLORY TO GLORY" (2 Cor. 3:18).
 3. And as your children see the difference in your life as over against the world's, they also will see the glory of the Lord shine from you and know that God is in their midst.
 4. Can your children see that glory? Can they tell that there is a difference, a difference so remarkable that it is unmistakable? You know the power of example in the life of a child. They are going to do what they see in you. Are you seeking to live holy in front of them? As you see them reflect your behavior, is it holy and godly behavior that they are imitating? You are either pointing them to Christ or away from Him. You must pursue holiness not only for your sake, but for their's as well.
- C. Third, You Must Also Let Them Know that They Are the Heirs of God's Gracious Covenants and Tell Them About the Wonderful Promises of the Covenant Which Were Sealed to Them in Baptism.
1. Peter said, "REPENT, AND LET EACH OF YOU BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. FOR THE PROMISE IS FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN, AND FOR ALL WHO ARE FAR OFF, AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL TO HIMSELF" (Acts 2:38-39).
 2. There are many blessings in the covenant. We are looking at them now. The greatest blessing is that of salvation, but only those who meet the requirements of faith and repentance shall inherit it.
 3. Are you under the impression that your children will automatically be saved because they are in the covenant? This kind of thinking in Reformed Churches is very dangerous for it leads us to think that we do not need to look for the marks of God's grace in the life of our children. If they do not become overt covenant breakers, then all is well.
 4. But yet, if there never is the exercise of saving faith and repentance, and if their lives, though they may be fairly good and well-behaved children, do not reflect Christ-likeness, growth in grace, and a hunger and thirst after righteousness, then you cannot assume that they are saved, nor would it be safe for their souls if you did.
 5. Have you seen these marks of grace in your children? Do you see them growing in Christ-likeness and being faithful to all that they understand to be the will of God? Do they try and throw off the yoke of God's authority in any area of their lives?
 6. If these marks are not in your children, then you need to continually remind them of their dangerous and lost state and of their need of faith and repentance. If these marks are not in your life, you need to come to Christ as well, and lay hold of Him by faith. You will find Him to be a gracious Savior, who will forgive all your sins and give to you a perfect righteousness.

- D. *Fourth, You Must Instruct Them in the Law of God, Praying that the Lord Would Change Their Hearts and Make It Their Delight.*
1. One of our greatest blessings is that we have the Scriptures entrusted to us.
 2. It is true that many in the world have copies of the Scriptures, but they are really the possession of the people of God.
 3. They teach us what is right and wrong, what is pleasing and displeasing to God. They also show us the way to life and salvation and warn us about the broad road to destruction.
 4. Do you teach your children the truths of Scripture? Do you teach them the doctrines and not just the stories? You must never forget that the stories are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. The end is that God would reveal His whole will to us, but He often does this through stories.
 5. Do you teach your children the Scriptures, what they are to believe and what they are to do? God said to the Israelites, "AND THESE WORDS, WHICH I AM COMMANDING YOU TODAY, SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART; AND YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR SONS AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU RISE UP" (Deu. 6:6-7). Are you teaching your children the Scriptures, not only through your words, but also through your life?
- E. *Fifth, You Must Bring Them to the Worship Services of God, and try and Include Them as Much as Possible.*
1. The divine service of worship is given to your children, as well as to you. It is a great testimony to the reality and blessing of God. Every Lord's day, the people of God gather to give their praise to Him who has blessed them so abundantly. To include our children in the worship of our most holy God is a tremendous witness and blessing to them.
 2. But in order for them to benefit from this blessing, you must come and bring them. Are you being diligent to bring your children to as many of the services as your circumstances will allow? Do you try and include them in the service? Do you listen to what is being said in the sermon and teach and apply an appropriate portion of it to your children?
 3. You cannot expect that one or two short services a week are going to be all that your children need to learn the ways of Christ. They need you to teach them at home, to pray with them, to sing with them. And the best way that you can fulfill this obligation to your family is by family worship. Gather them together, and as a family worship God, read His Word, pray to Him, and sing His songs. One of the greatest reasons for the decline in the spirituality of our churches and the number of children who are faithfully following the Lord is the decline in the number of families devoting themselves to family worship.
 4. There are other blessings as well, such as the godly men and women who have gone before us and the encouragement that they bring by way of example. But this is enough for now.
 5. And so people of God, realize the many precious benefits which are yours and your children's in God's covenant. Learn how it is that He wants you to use these and to raise your children. Carefully examine the way that you are raising your child now to see if you might be instilling the things of the world into

their hearts, rather than the things of God. And then, putting aside all worldliness, diligently use the means which God has given to you to faithfully raise up godly seed to Him. There is no other way that you will see godliness produced in your children.

6. *In the upcoming weeks, we are going to see what the Bible has to say on some crucial issues in raising our children, so that we might arm ourselves with everything which God has given us to see them walk with the Lord and serve Him all of their lives. Amen.*