

Covenant Parenting

Genesis 18:19

Halifax, February 17, 2007

Introduction:

How thankful we are to welcome another covenant child into our congregation today.

- Children a heritage from the LORD, and the fruit of the womb is His reward...
- We who have ourselves been made partakers of Christ have the privilege of bringing our little children to our faithful Saviour that He might bless them.
- He has told us that the kingdom of God belongs to those children whose parents bring them to Him for His blessing...
 - But how are we to bring our children to Him?
 - How are we to train them up within His kingdom?

What is a parent to do?

- There are so many different parenting paradigms out there and they can be so confusing...
 - There are books and magazines and seminars and government publications and psychologists and friends and parents
 - and then we have our own sentiments and our opinions that are so affected by our society...
 - but many of these are contrary to God's way.
 - You have a thousand conflicting ideas all thrown at them all at once.
 - How are you to sort it all out?

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, there is a way to cut through all the confusion...

- As disciples of Jesus Christ, it is for us to submit to God's parenting paradigm.
 - And that paradigm is not found from the world or the medical community or our friends or even within our own hearts... perhaps least of all from our own hearts!
 - It is found in the Word of God!
 - We have to shut out all the other noise and tune into the scriptures alone to receive His counsel alone.

And today, as I am called by God to minister His word to you,

- I want to direct you to a particular verse that lays out God's paradigm for parenting...

- That verse is Genesis 18:19.
- Interestingly, this verse is not found in a passage of scripture that is particularly about parenting...
 - It is found in a verse in which God is explaining why He is going to let Abraham know ahead of time what He is going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah...
 - You know, those two wicked cities that God rained down fire and brimstone upon...
 - God is explaining the reason that He is going to let Abraham know about these plans...
 - And the reason God is going to tell Abraham is because of the special relationship He has established with him...
- In the past, we have looked at this passage in its larger context...
 - and have seen how God is presenting this to Abraham so that he might intercede for his nephew...
 - but today, I want to zero in on this one verse that describes God's relationship with Abraham as the head of his household...
 - which household was destined to grow into a whole nation that would be blessed of the Lord.
 - This morning we want to look at this verse to learn about the kind of relationship that God has with every parent who, like Abraham, is numbered among His people.

There are two things I want to show you from this passage today...

- First, God's calling and promise to Abraham regarding his household
- Secondly, the duty that God has given to Abraham regarding his household.

But before I begin, I want to show the connection that believers have with Abraham...

- I want you to see that God presents Abraham to us a model of what it is to be a Christian.
 - It's true...
 - In the New Testament, Abraham is the one who is set forth to show us what it means to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation!

Turn with me for a moment to Galatians 3, the passage we read earlier...

- In this chapter, Paul is rebuking the Galatians because they seem to have forgotten the very basis by which they were brought into a saving relationship with God...
 - They were slipping into the pernicious error,

- so common in the church today,
 - that their acceptance with God was based on what they do instead of on what Christ did.
- How foolish this was!
 - Does the chapter not begin,
 - “Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”
 - Was their acceptance with God about what they had done?
 - Was it the Galatians who fulfilled God’s righteous requirement for salvation, or was it Jesus Christ?
 - Was it the Galatians who died on the cross to atone for their sins, or was it Jesus Christ who bore God’s curse to redeem them?
 - Should they trust in their own works, or in Jesus Christ?
- Of course Paul is arguing that it is on the basis of Christ and His work that we are saved.
 - But I want you to notice that throughout the passage
 - he shows us that Abraham is our example of what it means to believe in Christ.
 - In verse 6,
 - he says that Abraham believed God and it was counted to Him for righteousness...
 - And then in verse 7, he says,
 - “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham.”
 - And in verse 9 he says,
 - “So then, those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”
 - In verse 14,
 - he shows that the blessing we have if we are true Christians is the blessing of Abraham—
 - our blessing and Abraham’s blessing are one in the same.
 - And in verse 29, he really drives home the point...
 - He says,

- Gal 3:29: “And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”
- In other words, we are brought into the very same saving relationship with God that Abraham had!
 - We partake of the very same covenant of grace.
 - Abraham is a model of what it means to believe in Christ!
- You will say,
 - “But Christ had not yet come when Abraham lived...”
 - No He had not come, and that is one difference between us and Abraham...
 - But it is still essentially the same covenant of grace and the same Christ.
 - In both cases we are trusting in what God does to save us rather than in what we have done...
 - The difference is only in the perspective of history
 - Abraham lived before Christ came, so he trusted in what Christ was going to do—
 - he believed in Christ-promised...
 - Circumcision, and the Old Testament ceremonies, were about Christ promised.
 - We live after Christ’s coming, so we trust in what Christ has done...
 - we believe in Christ-given
 - Baptism and the New Testament sacraments are about Christ-given—Christ given for us.
 - Under the Old Testament as well as under the New,
 - There are many who have departed from the faith and have foolishly trusted in what they did for salvation instead of in the work of Christ.
 - The Galatians were doing this, so Paul points them to Abraham as an example of what it means to believe in Christ.
 - You see that Abraham is a model for us.

This being so, let us not return to Genesis 18:19 to look

- first at God’s calling and promise to Abraham regarding his household...
 - and secondly at the duty that God gave to Abraham...
- Only now, having seen that Abraham is a pattern for us of what we are in God’s covenant,

- I can present these two points to you in a more personal way to you who believe:
 - First, as the calling and promise given to **you** regarding your household...
 - Secondly, as the duty given to **you** regarding your household.
- And please note that I speak especially to you men because God has appointed each of you, as He did Abraham, to be the head of your household...
 - I will be in particular addressing you men this morning...
 - But this is not to say that you wives and children or you who are not married can tune out this morning...
 - It is important for all of you to understand these things and to consider first of all if you even have salvation in the kingdom of God...
 - and if do not,
 - to understand how desperate your situation is and the great salvation that you are neglecting...
 - and if you do,
 - to consider our place in the kingdom of God with respect to these promises and responsibilities.
 - If you are child, these are your promises and you are to submit to your parents as they train you up in the God's covenant...looking to God for His blessing with gratitude.
 - If you are a wife, it is for you to join with your husband and assist him and submit to him as he seeks to lead the family in God's covenant ways...
 - And if you are not attached to a Christian family,
 - it is for you to trust God for His promises to you and to pray earnestly for those who have children, and to assist them in whatever you can in the training up of their children in God's kingdom.
- Well then, I'll get on with it...
 - Look with me at Genesis 18:19

I. Men of the covenant, consider first of all the calling and promise given to you regarding your household.

- A. See here that God has uniquely chosen you in order that He might bless you and your household!
1. Verse 19 begins with God saying of Abraham (and so of you who believe) :
 - "For I have known him."
 - a. This means a lot more than merely that God knows about you...

- Of course He knows about you!
 - He knows everything!
 - He knows even the deepest thoughts and workings of your inner person.
 - As the scripture says, “He knows the secrets of our hearts.”
 - “All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”
 - That is true of everyone without exception.
 - You cannot hide from God...

b. But when God here says,

- “I have known him” of Abraham,
 - He is singling him out as one He knows in a unique way.

1) We can find clear examples of this special kind of knowing in other parts of scripture...

a) In Amos 3:2, the Lord says of His people:

- Amos 3:2: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."
- He is going to chasten them because they are His people.

b) And in Galatians 4:9, Paul speaks of believers in this way:

- Ga 4:9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God.
- It speaks of God’s choosing of us to be His people—
 - of His taking us as His own and becoming our God and making us to be His people.

2) God had come to know Abraham in this way just after the nations were scattered at the tower of Babel.

a) Do you remember the story?

- The earth was being populated again after the flood and there were seventy families that came together at Babel.
- They purposed to make a name for themselves by building a tower to heaven.
- They hoped that by banding together, they could make themselves secure.
- They felt that by banding together, they could bless themselves.

- (i) But God was not pleased with their autonomous pride...
 - Here they were, sinners, as we all are,
 - who thought that by coming together they could obtain a blessing for themselves apart from God!
 - They entertained the foolish notion that they could bless themselves apart from God.
- (ii) And do you remember what God did?
 - He confused their language and scattered them across the face of the earth.
 - He showed them that they could not be blessed apart from their Creator's favour...
 - He exposed their folly and reminded them that they were mere men.

TRANS> All this is recorded in Genesis 11..

- but look at what happens in chapter 12!
- b) God graciously comes to one man from one of the seventy families that had just been scattered...
 - (i) And to that one man in that one family, He makes a marvellous promise...
 - He promises to do for that man what the seventy families were attempting to do for themselves.
 - That one man, of course, is Abraham—
 - God **knows** him out of all the families of the earth that have just been scattered...
 - To be known of God is to be chosen by God... not because of anything Abraham did, but by mere grace alone.
 - (ii) And look at what God promises to do for Abraham in Genesis 12:2:
 - It is the very same thing the families had wanted to achieve at Babel when they banded together...
 - The Lord says:
 - Gen 12:2: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing—and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed..."
 - God would bring the blessing to Abraham that the world sought to obtain by their own efforts.

- And all these families that had just been scattered (and would grow into nations all over the world)
- would come back to find blessing in the blessing of Abraham.

(iii) But there is a huge difference in the way this blessing would be obtained...

(a) It would not be by human effort—men working together with all their might to bless themselves and make themselves great...

- It would be by divine grace—God would bring about the promised blessing upon Abraham...

(b) When God made this promise to Abraham, Abraham believed the promise...

- He stopped relying on himself and he started relying on the Lord for his blessing.
- It is vain to think that you can ever be blessed unless you are first reconciled to your Creator.

2. Genesis 18:19 makes it clear that God had known Abraham in order that (for the very reason that) He might bless him and his household...

a. In this verse, you notice that there are two *lamayan* statements.

1) *Lamayan* is the Hebrew word that means “in order that.”

- It gives the reason for something... and in this case, it gives the reason that God has known Abraham:
- “I have known him **in order that** he may command his children and his household after him...
- That is the first *lamayan* statement...
 - We are going to look at it later...
 - but it leads to second and ultimate *lamayan* statement at the end of the verse...
 - It is translated with the word **that**...
 - “**that** [or *in order that*] the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to Him.”

2) See the structure then, of this verse with these two *lamayan* statements...

- God’s ultimate purpose for knowing Abraham was to bring to him the promised blessing...

- and the way to get to that purpose was by enabling Abraham to train His household in God's way.
- b. And you can see that the blessing that God has promised (the thing He has spoken concerning Abraham that He wants to do for Him) is set forth right there in verse 18:
- Gen 18:18: "since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"
 - God has known Abraham—has chosen him and established His covenant with him—
 - in order that He might make him a great nation and that all the world might come to share in God's blessing of Him!

B. Now I want you to consider just what this blessing is!

1. That great nation that God is going to make Abraham grow into is the nation that we know as the kingdom of God...
 - a. It is the kingdom that Daniel spoke about that began as a little stone cut out of the mountain without human hands...
 - A little stone that would grow into a great mountain that would fill the whole earth.
 - It was the kingdom that God would establish, with such humble beginnings in one nation!
 - b. And this nations would be great because its king would be great—
 - Its king would be none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 - And He would enable sinful, fallen human beings to be God's people by washing away their sins and by giving them His Spirit.
 - He would turn around our condition of sin and misery by reconciling us with God and by establishing us as God's very own sons and daughters!
 - He will destroy all His enemies and we will live in perfect communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - c. Let me tell you, there may some of you here who do not have this salvation...
 - And I tell you that you are missing everything...
 - I mean, what are you trying to do?
 - What are you hanging on to?
 - Do you really think you will be able to bless yourself when you are a sinner, cursed of God?
 - We are all cursed of God until we come to Christ for salvation...

- If you die in your sin, without repenting,
 - your misery will only increase and then there will be no way to reverse it.
 - Don't go on in your folly!
 - Turn to Christ and be saved!
 - Forever is a long time.

TRANS> But now I want you who do believe to see something about this blessing.

- Remember that your blessing is the same as the blessing of Abraham...
 - God promised to Abraham that all the families (now nations) of the earth would be blessed through His seed...
 - They are blessed with the same blessing that Abraham was blessed with and with same promises...
2. And men of the covenant (you who believe), God's blessing is a blessing for you and your household just as it was for Abraham and his household.
- It is not just for you, but also for your household.
- a. God's promise to Abraham that he would become a great nation was a promise that God would be a God not only to him, but also to his children after him.
- The thing that God had promised to Abraham was that He would be a God to him and to his descendents after him...
 - And to confirm that his children were included in the covenant with him, God gave him the sign of circumcision,
 - and commanded that it be applied to his sons on the eighth day...
 - Even though it was a sign of the righteousness of faith (as Romans 4:11 says),
 - it was applied to Abraham's infant sons before they could declare their faith.
 - In Genesis 17, He is commanded to apply it to them on the eighth day to show that He is their God and they are His people.
 - the Lord declares that the promise is to Abraham and his descendents.
 - This showed clearly that God included the sons of Abraham in His covenant before they could even speak.
- b. And God made it strikingly clear to us that now that Christ has come, our children are still included in His covenant promise and are to be given the covenant sign.

- 1) In Acts 2 when the first converts to Christ were baptised after his resurrection on the day of Pentecost,
 - Peter commands them to receive the new sign of righteousness by faith in Jesus—now that Jesus has been given...
 - The sign of righteousness by faith is no longer circumcision, but baptism...
 - and notice that Peter, in commanding baptism,
 - uses the same language that God used with Abraham when he commanded him to circumcise his sons in Gen 17.

- 2) In Acts 2:38, he says:
 - Acts 2:38-39: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”
 - a) If you have been called to Jesus Christ,
 - if God has spoken His promise to you so that you have heard His voice and have believed,
 - Then He has known you in order that He may do for you all that He has promised for you and your household.
 - Peter shows that as it was with Abraham, so it is for you who believe after the appearing of Christ...
 - The promise is not just for you, but for you and your children.
 - Those who believe are to be received into the covenant together with their children...

 - b) Someone will say, but why should children be given the sign of the covenant before they are old enough to confess their faith in Jesus?
 - And the reason is that God has told us to include them in His bountiful mercy.
 - He does not look upon our children as cut off, but as partakers with us in the blessing.
 - The promise to you and to your children...
 - Jesus permits us to bring our children to Him to be blessed.
 - You see, God expects that anyone who is a believer will bring His children up in the way of the covenant.

- That means that the children at least begin in the way of the Lord...
- And God promises that if we train them up in His way, they will not depart from it.
- This doesn't mean they never do depart, but so do many adults who began as adults in God's covenant...
 - I have seen many adults come to Christ outwardly who did not continue...
 - The truth is, they were never born again, but as long as they outwardly kept the covenant, God commands us to receive them...
 - We can't see the heart.
- But there is a special promise to believers regarding their children.
 - God's election is not entirely random...
 - It is not just as likely that a believer's children will be saved as that a Muslim child will be saved...
 - There is no special promise to the Muslim child.
 - God has promised to bless our children if they will continue in the covenant, just as He has promised to bless us if we will continue in the covenant.
 - Our children are accepted by Him because, if we are believers, God expects us to train them up in the way of the covenant...
 - and He assures us that if we do, our labour will not be in vain.

TRANS> And this leads us to the next point...

II. Men of the covenant, consider secondly the duty given to you regarding your household.

A. This is the first *lamayan* of Genesis 18:19...

1. God says:

- Gen 18:19: "I have known him, **in order that** he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."
- God has chosen Abraham that he should command his children to keep the way of the Lord...
 - Men of the covenant, that is duty that God has given to you who believe!

2. And I want you to notice that this duty is directly connected with God's promised blessing... (the second *lamayan*)

a. The idea is...

- The second layman will not happen without the first...
- God has known Abraham in order that Abraham may command his household—
 - in order that He may bring His promised blessing to Abraham's household!
- If Abraham does not command His household after him to keep the way of the Lord,
 - then the blessing will not come to Abraham and his household...

1) This is obvious, isn't it?

- If children are not brought up in God's ways, they cannot know God's ways...
 - Fathers who neglect to train up their children forfeit God's promise concerning them.
 - In the book of Judges,
 - we are told that a generation grew up who did not know the Lord because they did not experience the mighty things that God did when he brought them into the land!
 - But these children would have known if their fathers had only taught them!

2) But you see that God has known Abraham in order that he would do this—that he would teach his children...

- And because God has known Abraham in order that he would do this,
 - Abraham will do this...
 - God, having purposed to bless Abraham's household, will see to it that Abraham commands them in the way of the Lord.
 - Through all of Israel's history—and the history of the church—there have been many dark times...
 - but there has never been a time and there never will be a time when there are no faithful households that God has chosen to keep His way...

- Always there are those He has known in order that they might continue in His covenant in order that He might bless them with His salvation.

b. But let me tell you on no uncertain terms...

- If you do not command your household in the way of the Lord,
 - Gentlemen, if you are not doing that...
 - It may well be the case that God has **not** known you in order that He might bring His blessing upon your household...
 - Unless you repent,
 - it may be that He has known you personally,
 - but that He has no intention of continuing His blessing to your household...
 - Whenever He has known you in order that He might bless your household,
 - He sees to it that you take up this responsibility.
 - He may very well bless them despite what you do,
 - but when He has known you in order that you may command them,
 - He always works His grace in you in such a way that you do command them in His way.

B. And now men, I want you to see what that way is in which you are to command your children and your household to keep...

1. First of all, see that it is a way in which you are to **command** them!

a. You are not merely to **lead** them or **direct** them to keep God's way,

1) You are to **command** them!

- You do not give them a choice in the matter, but like Joshua, you say,
 - "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."
 - You are to insist upon it for your household.

2) This is why from their very birth, you are commanded to give them the sign of the covenant...

- You are not giving them a choice in the matter, you are commanding them!
- If your child was out on the train tracks, you would not ask him what he wants to do when the train is coming!

- You will command him to get off the tracks—you will snatch him if you have to!
- 3) I don't mean in saying that that children don't have to come to personalise their faith...
- They do, or they cannot be saved...
 - but this is not to be presented to them as an option, but as an order...
 - God does not invite, but commands all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.
 - Unbelief is not just an intellectual problem—it is rebellion.
- b. There is, in our day, far too little authority exercised by fathers in their households...
- Is it any wonder that there are so many children that are cut off from the covenant when they get older?
 - Their fathers did not command them...
 - They left the children to go in their own way... so they went in their own way.

TRANS> So you see in the first place that you are to command them.

2. Secondly, I want you to see **what** you are to command to...
- a. Genesis 18:19 says you are to command them *to keep the way of the LORD*.
- This is very important!
 - Fathers, God has not authorised you to command your children in your own way...
 - There are some fathers and husbands in the church who act like God has authorised them to be a selfish dictator—
 - to order their wives and children around according to their own selfish desires!
 - This has been such a common abuse in western civilisation that it causes many of us to look askance at authority...
 - Many of us look at the exercise of authority as always abusive.
 - Many of us are very squeamish about commanding our children at all.
 - There are many fathers today who are so effeminate and foppish that they have never even chastened their children...

- never mind that God says this is a sure sign that they hate their children...
- they have been so influenced by the negativity of our whole society against exercising authority—
 - that to do so is always seen as selfish and cruel.

TRANS> But the Lord is not calling us to exercise selfish authority!

b. He is calling us to command our children in His ways! His gracious ways!

1) Men, you are to be God's minister to your children!

- You are not to bring your word to bear upon them, but God's word!
- You are not to demand that they bring you your supper or to snap at them when they do something that inconveniences you.
- You are not authorised to use them as a punching bag when you have had a bad day...

2) You are rather to bring God's precious counsel and God's precious promises and apply them to your household and to your children.

- You are to speak for Him!
- You are His representative!

c. What is His way?

1) Well, it is the way of righteousness and justice—you are to command them to do righteousness and justice before God...

2) And God's way of righteousness and justice is the way of Jesus Christ...

a) You are to command them to follow Jesus Christ—

- to repent of their sins and to believe in Him...

b) You are to show them that we, being sinners, always come far short of what God requires...

(i) He expects us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

- You are to hold this standard before them and command them in it...

(ii) But you are to show them that the only way they can measure up to what God requires is by trusting in Jesus Christ to cleanse them from their sin...

- This is why they were baptised...
- Baptism is done with water because water cleanses...

- We need to be cleansed by Jesus blood so that our sins can be forgiven...
- and by His Spirit so that we can live a new life...

(iii) Show your children that they cannot cleanse away their own sins...

- They must not be like the men at Babel who tried to bless themselves—they will always fail...
- The way of the Lord they are commanded to keep is the way of Jesus...
 - He is God's way...
 - He is the way, the truth, and the life... no one comes to the Father but by Him...
 - no one can be blessed by through faith in Him.
 - This is the way in which you are to command your children!

TRANS> So you see then that you are to command them, and the way you are to command them in is the way of the Lord.

3. And now thirdly, I want you to see that you are to command them *after you*...

- Do you see that in Gen 18:19?
 - God says,
 - "I have known him in order that he may command his children and his household **after him**."
- a. If you yourself do not keep God's covenant, then it is not for you to command your children to do so...
 - That is the way of the hypocrite—
 - The parent who says "do as I say and not as I do..." is a hypocrite.
 - The Bible teaches that the only children that are regarded as holy—the only ones who are to be given the sign of the covenant...
 - are those who have at least one believing parent.
 - That is why we refuse to baptise a child unless he has at least one parent who is himself a member in good standing of the church...
 - at least one parent who makes a credible profession of faith.
 - 1 Cor 7 makes it clear that the children of unbelievers are unclean...

- You are not authorised to command your children in the way of the covenant if you yourself are not keeping the covenant.
- b. And don't suppose that this means you cannot command them to obey anything unless you are perfectly obeying it...
- 1) If you think that, you did not understand what I just said about what the way is...
 - The way we command them to go in is the way of Christ...
 - If you put before them the way of perfect obedience, you will drive them to despair!
 - The standard is perfect obedience, but the way is Christ.
 - This is a way that you can keep—it is not up in heaven or in the depths of the sea...
 - The word is near you—on your lips and in your heart...
 - It is the word of faith which we preach.
 - 2) It is only then that we give God due honour as sinners before Him...
 - neither diminishing His commands so as to pretend that we keep them...
 - nor ignoring them so as to treat them as irrelevant...
 - but to keep His way by keeping to Jesus Christ.
 - That is the way in which you are to bring your children.

Conclusion,

Men of the covenant,

- It is God who gives you the grace you need in order that you may command your household in His way... the way of Christ...
 - And He does that in order that He may bring His promised blessing to you and your household.
- It is for you to humble yourself and believe...
 - to realise that you cannot bless yourself or your household...
 - but that the Lord alone can bless you through Jesus Christ as He has promised.
- Do not follow the ways of the world or the way of the men of Babel,
 - but follow the way of Abraham.
 - He is God's pattern man who shows us the way we are to go...
 - What God has promised to him He promises to all of you whom He has known, and who believe.
 - There is no need to be confused about parenting... God has spoken... hear Him!