paedofaith:
a primer on the mystery of infant salvation and a handbook for covenant parents

rich lusk

athanasius press
monroe, louisiana

Rich Lusk
Paedofaith: *A Primer on the Mystery of Infant Salvation and a Handbook for Covenant Parents*

Published by Athanasius Press
205 Roselawn
Monroe, LA 71201
318-323-3061

Faithful Christian parenting is hard work. Every child presents his or her own distinctive challenges and difficulties. Every child will have his or her unique ups and downs, triumphs and defeats, joys and struggles, and phases and stages. Nothing can prepare parents for everything they will face. There is no possibility of taking a cookie-cutter approach. Every child is full of mystery and possibility.

Living at the end of an era further complicates the parenting task. The capital of medieval and Reformational Christendom is nearly spent, and a new dark age of moral bankruptcy is upon us. This is a time of transition, but to an era of we-know-not-what. Our period seems more "catacomb" than "cathedral," more "exile" than "conquest" for the faithful remnant in the West. Christian moms and dads in twenty-first century America have all the powerful forces of worldly culture arrayed against them, seeking to undermine their efforts at every step. A new temptation for our children is lurking right around every corner, aiming to suck them into crass hedonism, materialism, consumerism, or some other pattern of vice that afflicts our sick, idolatrous civilization. Our culture hates maturity and basks in ignorance. The ubiquity of pop culture makes retreatist, isolationist strategies naïve. We cannot merely build a hedge around our homes to keep the world out. We have to train and equip our children to face and fight the world in all its worldliness, rather than seek to escape from it. It seems that we confront very long odds as we aim at inculcating wisdom, discipline, habitual holiness, and a missional spirit in our children, living as we do in a (post)modern world of faithlessness and flux.

In such circumstances, we must ask, is there any biblical constant we can rely on in raising our children? The answer to that question is most assuredly, *Yes.* That constant is the covenant. God's covenant with us is utterly trustworthy, and it includes our children. The covenant is the bedrock on which we seek to build our own lives and the lives of our children. The covenant does not make parenting a simple task, but

it does provide a framework for understanding who our children are, what we should do for them, and what we should expect from them.

Grasping the way in which our children participate by grace through faith in God's covenant is the heart of faithful Christian parenting—and the heart of this book as well. In light of the covenant promises, Christian parents must press upon their children the privileges and obligations of covenant membership, training them to recognize and regard themselves as children of God, so that they will feel, think, and act accordingly.

My hope is that this book—which focuses especially on how the promises of God to our children apply even from the point of conception—will help Christian parents undertake their task with greater faithfulness and diligence. God's covenant promises embrace our children at every stage of their development, from the commencement of life forward. Of course, God's gracious gift does not eliminate the possibility of presumption or even apostasy later in life; therefore, we must be vigilant as parents, and exhort our children to vigilance as well. We teach our children to repent continually and believe precisely because we believe they are *already* believers. If the church is going to thrive in a post-Christendom situation, she must do a much better job of keeping her children true to the faith of their childhood. We must not wait to begin Spiritually nurturing our children, or we will always be playing catch-up in our quest to form mature disciples of Christ. We must recover the principles and methods of covenant succession. This book is my humble contribution to that end.

I offer special thanks to the board of Athanasius Press for supporting the publication of this book. There have been very, very few published works on the topic of infant faith in Reformed circles, and only a handful more by Lutheran and Anglican theologians. The subject is often ignored, ridiculed, or relegated to minimal treatment as a subsidiary of discussions about infant baptism. I know of no book-length treatment on infant faith in print in English. Only a few articles on the subject exist and even fewer are readily available. Nevertheless, the Athanasius board was willing to allow this rather odd piece of work to see the light of day, and for that I am grateful. I hope their risk will be

amply rewarded. I trust this volume will fill an important but empty niche on Reformed bookshelves.

Duane and Sarah Garner deserve heaps of praise for handling the technical aspects of publication, including editing and indexing. Without their efforts, this book would never have made it off my hard drive and to the printer. The Garners have continually performed invaluable, behind-the-scenes work for Athanasius Press. They deserve public credit for their hard labor and sound counsel along the way. Of course, the final product in your hands—flaws and all—remains my responsibility (God help me!).

This book is dedicated (for obvious reasons) to my family: my wife of ten years, Jenny, and our four growing paedobelievers—John, Rebekah, Hannah Kate, and Annie. Jenny has been a wonderful companion in the hard but rewarding work of raising our children. She is a faithful wife and mother, playing to perfection the most difficult role in the world, that of a pastor's wife. She models faith in the reliability of God's covenant promise to be our God and the God of our children. She is my constant joy and my greatest earthly treasure. Watching our children grow toward maturity together (physically, socially, and especially in Christ) is both thrilling and rewarding. Hopefully this book can serve as a small token of my appreciation for the lessons we have learned (and continue to learn!) together.

I trust that when my children get a bit older they may have some interest in this work. (After all, they wonder even now what Dad is doing in the basement all day long!) Well, kids, this is it: I spent hours working on this book so that you'd know what Mom and I were trying to accomplish in your lives all these years! Our goal all along has been to form your initial paedofaith into mature, humble, obedient adult faith so that you can serve loyally in Christ's kingdom all your days. Forgive us where we failed you and rejoice with us in the free grace that God has given to us as a family. And most of all, never forget my family mantras: "Remember your baptism!" and "Be who you are!"

August 14, 2005
Thirteenth Sunday of Trinity Season
Birmingham, Alabama

contents

introduction

the vexing question

The question whether or not infants of Christian parents can have faith has been a vexing one throughout the history of the church. For some theologians, infants are the model of gospel grace because their helplessness is so utterly apparent. Not only is it affirmed that infants can have faith, the reality is that they can have *nothing but* faith![1] Others

1. The Puritan Thomas Hooker argued infants were more fit recipients of baptism than adults because they were less habituated in sin and therefore less prone to resist the Spirit. See E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570–1720* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974). See also B. B. Warfield, "Children," in *Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, reprint, 2001), vol. 1, 224ff. Warfield suggests children are models of kingdom membership not because of their supposed innocence, or humility, or even because of their disposition to trust, but because of their utter and obvious dependence on others. It is "in a word, in the helplessness, or, if you will, the absolute dependence of infancy" that their fitness for the kingdom is found. Infants are

view the mere suggestion of paedofaith as ridiculous, as "incompatible with Scripture and common sense."[2] Infants have not yet developed powers of mind and will, so they are incapable of exercising belief. Infant faith is an "anthropologically and psychologically impossible construction."[3] Discussion of the issue has often been clouded by poor exegesis, debatable definitions of faith, and widely varying presuppositions about the innate abilities of infants and the ways in which God works on the human mind and heart.

If faith is defined as a composite of knowledge, assent, and trust, then clearly infants do *not* have faith. They cannot have propositional knowledge and do not have the self-awareness needed for active assent; however, perhaps infants are capable of a "seed" of faith, defined here as a *relational posture of trust* toward another person.[4] There is much

---

the best illustrations of grace: "The children of the kingdom enter it as children enter the world, stripped and naked—infants, for whom all must be done, not who are capable of doing . . . As children enter the world, so men enter the kingdom, with no contributions in their hands." Their state of "utter dependence" thus reveals "the real condition of every sinner" (230–31). Children are important because of the transparent insight they give us into the human condition. Of course, they are also offensive to some for just this same reason. Arminians, of course, could never affirm paedofaith since for them, faith is a human work and requires some measure of intellectual as well as moral ability. Only Calvinists—who stress that faith is a gift of God's sovereign grace—can even contemplate the possibility of paedofaith. Many of the church fathers who advocated a doctrine of infant faith (e.g., Augustine) did so by pointing to the gift-nature of faith. The leading Reformers did the same, as we will see. In fact, many Reformers viewed infant baptism, including the gift of infant faith, as a measure of the graciousness of the gospel.

2. Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 168.

3. This is the view of Werner Wiesner, quoted in Gottfried Hoffmann's essay "The Baptism and Faith of Children" in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus,* eds. Kurt Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen (Fort Wayne, IN: Graphic Publishing Company, 1985), 83.

4. "Seed faith" in this paper is simply "baby faith." Hoffman's definition is helpful. "Faith therefore here means a confident personal relatedness of the heart to Jesus which can exist without a detailed and articulated understanding of what is and must be unfolded in the proclamation of the gospel . . . This state of affairs leads to an intensification of the concept of faith in the case of children on account of the fact that it here means a relatedness to Christ, a trust in the person of Christ behind which the individual and utterable elements of the deposit of

prima facie evidence in Scripture that makes such a viewpoint plausible.

The purpose of this work is to take a closer look at those biblical data (focusing on the psalms and the gospels) with the desire to draw a hard verdict about the possibility (and even probability) of infant faith. After reaching a favorable conclusion with regard to infant faith in covenant families, we will turn to deal with the question of the fate of infants who die in infancy. We will also look summarily at the historical precedents for infant faith within the Protestant tradition and seek to draw out some of the theological, pastoral, and parental implications that flow out of our affirmation of paedofaith. We will find paedofaith to be grounded in a biblical theology of the covenant promises and of immense practical significance for the life of the church.

---

faith recede. Even for adults, there obtains in principle no other way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for children and infants: faith in Jesus" (87).

Faith's core of relational trust matures to include propositional knowledge and mental/volitional assent as the child grows.

one

paedofaith in the psalms

The Psalter is the great handbook of Christian experience. It covers the whole range of Christian feeling and devotion from infancy to old age. It climbs to the heights of God's grace and sinks to the depths of human despair. If we desire to understand our own experiences of God's grace, and those of our children, there is no better place to turn. In particular, if we want to understand what it means to grow up in a covenant family among the people of God, in the psalms we will find a rich treasury of testimony and practical instruction. Much of what we see in the Psalter with regard to the experiences of the faithful surprises us. We find David (and others) saying things we would never dare say. Nowhere is this more true than when it comes to covenant children. The Psalter gives us a very different view of growing up in the covenant than one finds in the great bulk of American Christianity (even in its Reformed expressions).[1]

1. Obviously, this is troubling. Unfortunately, the historic Reformed practice of singing psalms in worship has been undercut by contemporary worship music. While this newer music is not sinful, of course, it is often trite and shallow

Psalm 22

We begin our survey with Psalm 22. In Psalm 22:9–10, David asserts that he had faith as an infant. He sees continuity between the faith he possesses now as an adult and the faith he had as a child, even in the womb. He explains that he had a Godward orientation from his earliest days. In recounting his formative experiences, David never points to a dramatic "conversion experience," but always traces back the origin of his Spiritual life to the very beginnings of his physical life. As far as David knows, a relationship with God was always already there. He passed through no preparatory phase on his way to becoming a faithful covenant member; he did not have to wait until he reached an age of accountability to become a believer; he did not have to be able to articulate propositional truth in order to exercise faith.

David claims to have had paedofaith (that is, infant faith). This was certainly *not* because David believed infants somehow escaped the pollution of original sin or possessed an innate moral goodness. David was not a naïve sentimentalist or a proto-Pelagian. In fact, David confesses elsewhere that he was conceived in iniquity (Ps. 51:5). Apparently, for David, sin and faith were no more mutually exclusive in infants than in adults. Humans are sinners from the moment of conception, yet in those infants who are also participants in the covenant promises, God's grace is already operative.

Those who claim *a priori* that infant faith is impossible pose several alternative readings of Psalm 22:9–10, of course. Perhaps, they say, this portion of the psalm is Christological, not Davidic. They will point to other explicitly messianic portions of the psalm (22:1, 22:14ff). This is based on a flawed hermeneutic. The entire psalm—indeed, *the entire Psalter*—is messianic (e.g., Lk. 24:44; cf. Rom. 15:3; Heb. 10:5). Psalm 22 is both historical and Christological. It is a prayer of David *and* a prayer of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus prayed it *through* David as His prototype and

---

compared to the psalms and hymns shaped by the psalms. It cannot bring us to the same level of maturity as the singing of psalms. As we have lost touch with the Psalter, we have lost touch with our best model for a life of piety and devotion. We need to put the psalms back at the center of corporate worship. Until we do so, many biblical themes (including paedofaith, as I will argue here) will seem completely foreign to us.

forerunner.[2] But we cannot discount the meaning of this psalm in its original context, nor can we carve up the psalm into sections that belong exclusively to David and sections that belong solely to Jesus. However prophetic they may be of the coming Christ, these are David's own words, penned under inspiration, describing his own life.[3] David's case is a *bona fide*, irrefutable example of paedofaith.

Others have suggested that David's words are not to be taken at face value in their literal sense. In other words, David is not actually saying he *remembers* having faith as an infant; rather, he is using poetic license to make a point about God's care for him from early on in life. This is David's typical, exaggerated way of describing the overwhelming goodness of God. Elsewhere the psalm uses poetic language to describe David's enemies as wild beasts (e.g., 22:12, 16); perhaps the description of infant faith should be interpreted metaphorically as well.

Certainly, I do not think we need to say that David *consciously remembers* trusting in God, even from the womb. Obviously, none of us can remember that far back in our experience! But in reality, this only strengthens the case for infant faith. David is asserting that he had faith, and he *knows* he had faith. This is not simply hyperbolic, poetic lan-

---

2. On the pervasive Christology of the book of Psalms, see James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991).

3. Of course, even if we limited the words to Christ, we would still have an example of infant faith. Jesus Himself was fully human; if He was capable of faith as an infant, in principle, other infants are capable of faith as well. We must reject docetic christologies, even when contemplating Jesus' infancy. He is like us in every way (including the capacity for faith) except sin. We might ask, assuming that Jesus is the ultimate Man of Faith (Heb. 12:1–2), *at what age did He begin to trust His heavenly Father*? To ask the question is to answer it. Surely the human Jesus never lived without faith, even as an embryo. John Calvin writes: "Truly Christ was sanctified from earliest infancy in order that He might sanctify in Himself His elect from every age without distinction . . . If we have in Christ the most perfect example of all the graces which God bestows upon His children, in this respect also He will be for us a proof that the age of infancy is not utterly averse to sanctification" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], 4.16.18).

This argument that Christ passed through each stage of human life to sanctify it goes all the way back to the early Church; however, the sanctification of life only takes place as the Spirit works faith.

guage, nor is it a matter of speculation or conjecture. David is doing more than simply saying that he cannot remember a time in his life when he did not know God (though that is included). *He is viewing his infancy through the lens of the covenant promise*, setting forth what must have been his pre-cognitive experience. David knows the covenant promise explicitly includes the children of believers: "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" (Gen. 17:7).

Before a child of the promise can do any good work or make any kind of profession, God is already his God. In this psalm, David narrates the early chapters of his life story not in terms of remembered experiences, but in terms of God's covenant pledge. He derives the fact that he had infant faith not from an introspective examination of his past, but from an exegesis of the covenant promises.

Thus, in light of David's claim, we can say as soon as a covenant child is conceived, the promise has validity for that child. The promise does *not* say that God will become a God to our children when they reach a certain age or level of intellectual and physical maturity; rather, the promise declares that *from the very beginning of their lives*, our children stand in the same covenantal relationship with God that we ourselves are in by virtue of faith. They participate in the faith-life of the community. In other words, the child of the covenant is not only given promises, he is given the faith by which those promises are appropriated and made his own. The covenant child is included in a faith-based covenantal relationship with God. To deny the reality of paedofaith is to say the covenant promise only stretches halfway between God and the child. It implies covenant children are automatically covenant-breakers because they cannot fulfill the covenant conditions.

In light of this psalm, we must conclude that the status and standing of children in the covenant are identical to that of their parents. The children share in the faith of their parents and thus share in the same blessings and benefits of the covenant. God is our God from the time of our youth if we are conceived and born into a covenant family.

Properly understood, this doesn't feed presumption, for while the covenant is a blessed relationship, it is also a conditional relationship

(Gen. 17:1, 8). Our children are under the same covenantal demand of persevering faith that we are under. They must mature in faith as they mature in other aspects of their personality. They must grow, even as we must we grow (cf. 1 Pt. 2:2); however, Psalm 22:9–10 describes the normative *starting point* for covenant children. God gives us children with faith. Covenant children begin life as believers, not in need of conversion but endurance (cf. Heb. 10:36). They should be received and raised as children of God.

Note that David is not presenting his paedofaith as a one-in-a-million case. After all, his description of faith, even from the womb, was part of Israel's public hymnbook used in corporate worship. This is not a private prayer journal, but part of a covenantal liturgy. In public praise, every Israelite would have made the words of David his own and would have been expected to be able to identify with them in some form or fashion. While I would not necessarily want to claim infant faith is absolutely universal among covenant children (more on this in chapter five), at the very least, we can say it is "normative" or "paradigmatic" or "expected."[4] It is the normal course of events, part of a typical covenant child's pattern of development. In much the same way that hymns like Wesley's "And Can It Be?" have made adult conversion the norm ("Long my imprisoned

4. It seems to me that paedofaith is even bound up in the biblical warrant for paedobaptism, a notion we shall return to near the end of this book. At this point, a few thoughts will suffice: to baptize unbelieving subjects would profane and abuse baptism just as much as inviting unbelievers to the Lord's Table would abuse the sacramental meal. We would never knowingly baptize unbelieving adults, so why baptize a child unless we have some reason to regard him as a believer? *At the very least*, infant faith should be regarded as a presumption or judgment of charity, though I think it preferable to view it as a matter of trusting the covenant promises. In an absolute sense, we can never know another's heart, so we can never know with absolute certainty if they possess faith. In this sense, regarding infants as believers is really no different than regarding professing Christian adults as genuine believers. If parents believe God's covenant promises to and about their children, I see no reason for them to doubt the presence of faith in the hearts of their children. Psalm 22:9–10 is as true of their children as it was of David. Thus, in a healthy Reformed church, there is absolutely no solid basis for doubting the faith of the little ones in the congregation. God is a God to our children; being their God entails giving them faith. He promises to become a God to them in infancy, not at some later date. Our children are not aliens and strangers to the covenant promises, but are fully included.

spirit lay . . .") in revivalistic churches, so David's psalm made infant faith and covenant nurture the norm in ancient Israel. Certainly, God is free to work when, how, and where He pleases, but God's *ordinary* way of dealing with covenant infants includes giving them the gift of faith in the womb.[5] The revivalistic paradigm turns David's experience inside out. The typical pattern is for a covenant child to grow in faith from his infancy (cf. the prophet's testimony in 1 Ki. 18:12).

Finally, why does David tie his paedofaith to nursing at his mother's breast in verse nine? It seems that David is indicating that God's covenant sanctifies the natural bonds between parent and child so that the "natural" care the parent gives to the child becomes means of grace to him. God extends favor to David precisely in and through the favor shown by his

---

5. See Geoffrey Bromiley, *Children of the Promise: The Case For Baptizing Infants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 71–72. It might be asked: if this is true, why, then, in modern evangelicalism, do so many of our covenant children grow up and have a "conversion experience" at a later point in life? Certainly part of the reason so many of our children cannot relate directly to David's words is because we have *trained them* (that is, *conditioned them*) to seek after and interpret their experiences of God's grace through a different paradigm. We program them to think of themselves as unbelievers until they have the expected experience. We do not think they are (or can be) Christians until they get older.

The problem is not that the children lack faith, but that the adults do! They refuse to take the covenant promises about children seriously. They ignore the significance of infant baptism. I am not necessarily saying these conversions are "trumped up" by parental and ecclesial expectations, but I do think those expectations bear a lot of weight in shaping their Spiritual experiences.

If we applied the Davidic paradigm to our children (reckoning them as believers and treating them accordingly from infancy onward), we might be surprised at how their experiences would turn out quite differently (and considerably more in line with Psalm 22:8–9!). It is certainly possible for a child in a Christian home to have the gospel so clouded and obscured by false teaching, lack of loving discipline, a weak relationship with the local church, and so forth, that faith either stagnates or dies in youth, only to be revived at a later age. However, this kind of thing should never be the norm. Ordinarily, children in Christian homes should grow up Christian. I know that as I have reflected back on my own experience growing up as a covenant child, I have had to learn continually to re-narrate my past in light of a deeper understanding of God's Word, pushing the time of my "conversion experience" back from college, to high school, to elementary school, and finally to infancy. Hopefully, my own children will not have to do such re-narration, and "Davidspeak" will come naturally to them when they tell the story of God's gracious work in their lives.

parents. In a faithful home even a routine motherly task like nursing is not *merely* nursing, but a way in which the Spirit is communicated from God though the parent to the child (Jn. 7:38). In some mysterious way, nursing feeds not only David's body, but his faith. God's covenant promise and the work of the Spirit consecrate the organic bonds in the family so that parental care becomes a means of divine care. God gives Himself to the child through the labors and efforts of the parents. He blends His love in with their love.

Psalm 71

Of course, Psalm 22 is not the only reference to paedofaith in the Psalter. We find something similar in Psalm 71:5–6. Here, the psalmist once again describes himself as having a trusting, personal relationship with God from his earliest days. God was the trust of his youth and continued to be the object of his praise as an adult. So here, for the child of the covenant, as in Psalm 22, the beginning of Spiritual life is coordinated with the beginning of physical life. When a sperm and egg unite in a covenant womb, the embryo already has a promise from God and an inescapable relationship with God.[6] This reiterates what we have already seen: God is a God to our children from the moment of conception, and being their God includes giving them a nascent faith. Christian embryos have embryonic faith.

---

6. This relationship is not a matter of *nature* but of *grace*. It is due to God's Spirit, not DNA. It is a matter of covenantal inheritance, not genetic inheritance. As soon as the new life is formed, that embryonic person is under the provisions of God's covenant promises. (This is why covenant promises would also apply to adopted children.)

Obviously, non-covenantal infants have a relationship with God from their earliest days as well, but it is a broken relationship. They are in Adam; Christ has made no explicit biblical promise to translate them out of the old humanity and into the new. There is no hard biblical evidence that they have the same favorable Godward orientation that covenant children have. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary. They are related to God as covenant-breakers unless and until they repent. God may be mysteriously merciful to them if they die in infancy, but since Scripture is basically silent on this point, there's not much we can say. We can hope for un-covenanted mercies through the blood of Christ in such cases, but if God leaves these children to perish in their sin, He is fully just.

Specifically in 71:5, the psalmist speaks of having hope in God from his earliest days. Apparently, there was never a time in his life when he lived without this hope. In verse six he speaks of God's special care for him from birth. God brought him out of the womb safely, and it is this past track record of divine faithfulness that serves to bolster the psalmist's mature confidence that God will now deliver him from the wicked men who seek his harm and ruin (71:4). Because God has sheltered him with favor and care from his earliest days, He will continue to do so on into old age (71:9). From cradle to death bed, the Lord will be faithful to the covenant. This is the psalmist's assurance in a distressing time.

If we take the framework of the psalmist seriously, the covenant child would never need to pose the question, "What must I do to be saved?" That question would never even occur to the child. Salvation has belonged to him from the beginning because of God's covenant promise (71:6). He does not need a conversion experience when he reaches a mythical age of accountability. Instead, he simply needs to continue maturing and growing in the trust of his youth (71:5). Indeed, the psalmist pledges himself to just this kind of faith-filled perseverance later on in his prayer (71:14–18).

Certainly this paradigm of covenant nurture does not preclude the possibility of passing through various "crisis points" as the child matures. It does not mean the child's growth will be a straight upward climb. In Psalm 71 we find David facing challenges to his faith, but he does not allow the crisis to subvert his certainty that God has been with him the whole course of his life. As God brings him through the trial, he enters a new phase of maturity, but he will not confuse this with initial conversion. Infant faith does not negate the need for the child's growth; rather, it gives us a basis for expecting instruction, discipline, and nurture to be effective in the life of the child. Parents especially should take note of the way David interprets his experience. This should be our controlling paradigm in regard to our own children.[7]

---

7. Again, this helps us understand what is going on when kids today from faithful evangelical homes grow up and have what are often deemed "conversion" experiences. Evangelical culture does not consider infant faith a possibility, much less a probability, and so, practically speaking, children of Christian parents are regarded as any other category of unbelievers. We do not regard chil-

Psalm 139

Another important psalm is 139. Psalm 139:14–15 has been pressed into generic usage because of contemporary debates over abortion, but these verses have a very specific, covenantal focus. Jack Collins, professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, suggests the following as the best translation of 139:14: "I praise you for the fact that I have been awesomely distinguished [as a member of your covenant people]; your works are wonderful, and my soul knows it well." Without repeating Collins' fine linguistic work on the passage, we should note the nu-

---

dren as part of God's believing family, so they do not regard themselves in this way either. However, these same children naturally desire to live up to parental expectations. We *insist* that that they have a decisive and dateable transition point, and they do so. However, in light of the above data, it is actually likely that such experiences are not about conversion per se except in the more general sense that the whole Christian life is one of continued deeper and deeper conversion from sin and unbelief to repentance and faith (e.g., Lk. 22:32). Think about David—he grew up trusting in God, but at several junctures in his life (as we know from numerous psalms!) he was "re-converted" and renewed as he passed through crisis situations. The same happens to all of us, including our children. Thus, we shouldn't discount their new experiences of God's grace as they hit puberty, go off to college, start families of their own, or face illnesses. These are experiences through which God brings true change, real spurts of Spiritual growth. We should be thankful for them.

But these "awakenings" or "mini-conversions," however powerful, should not be confused with initial conversion, as though the child was not a believer in any sense until he walked an aisle in elementary school, went off to a summer camp in high school, or got involved in a campus ministry in college. These experiences should be interpreted against the backdrop of texts like Psalm 22:9–10 and 71:5–6. The experiences are not necessarily problematic; the issue is our flawed understanding of them. Experience should be analyzed in light of Scripture, not nineteenth-century revivalist theology.

Many covenant children grow up and come to despise, or at least discount, the Christian nurture they were given in their youth. Because they were young, expressions of faith and piety were regarded as programmed and insincere. Likewise, they do not value the baptism they received in infancy. In this way, skepticism about the Spiritual experiences of children is perpetuated.

In addition, they may all too easily fall into a "once saved always saved" doctrine in which a one-time crisis conversion experience is said to secure salvation even apart from a subsequent life of obedience. This contrasts with the biblical teaching of the perseverance of the elect. All this fosters an unhealthy view of the means of grace and a hankering after the spectacular rather than an appreciation for God's more ordinary ways of working. We will take up this subject of covenant nurture in the final chapter.

ance of the verb "to be distinguished" in this context. Collins points out that each time this verb is used in the Old Testament (Ex. 9:4; 11:7; 33:16), "the distinction is one in which the covenant member is set apart for God's gracious attention." Thus, in Psalm 139:14, the psalmist is expressing awe, not simply over God's creative work in forming him in his mother's womb (as many translations imply); rather, he is praising God for having set him apart as a participant in His covenant of salvation. "In context this is praise that one's experience of God's covenantal blessings extends back to the very beginning of one's existence," as Collins puts it. This is not a generic declaration applicable to all *in utero* children; it is a special proclamation of God's care and favor for those children who belong to His covenant. These children are "awesomely distinguished" from children conceived outside the pale of the covenant community (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14).

Collins demonstrates persuasively that this translation and interpretation fit well with the rest of the psalm. In particular, the psalm focuses on the intimate knowledge God has of His people (139:1–6, 23–24). There is no place the psalmist can go that would take him outside the realm of God's care (139:7–12). Even in the womb, even before his own mother knew him, God knew the psalmist and loved him (139:13–18). In Psalm 139:19–22, then, the psalmist declares his loyalty to God in response to God's merciful provision. Finally, Collins says,

> verses twenty-three and twenty-four invite God to continue His examination all the length of the author's life, because the purging of his inner life from all impurity is the key to his remaining in the way to eternal blessedness.

The psalmist *entered* this way even in the womb; now he *continues* in that way by growing and maturing in his faith. Once again, we see that the covenant relationship extends from conception to expiration. This psalm contemplates the entire life of the covenant member, showing how his whole existence has been enveloped by God's mercy. The story runs from faith to ever-increasing faithfulness; from baby faith to ripened, mature faith.

Collins then echoes my earlier point about Psalm 22:9–10: it will not do to say that this is an experience unique to David. It has normative force, so we are warranted in applying it to covenant children as a class. All such children are conceived and grow up within the sphere of covenanted mercies.

> Is this simply a record of the personal experience of the author? No: whatever its origin, it is now in the Psalter, which means that its primary function is to provide fitting words for God's covenant people to use in their public corporate worship. The redemptive-historical setting of this psalm is an era in which virtually all the pious members of the covenant people were raised in what we would call believing covenant homes; and this psalm is equipping them to trace their experience of God's intimate love and care right back to the time they were embryos.
>
> The people sing that their relationship with God dates from their time in the womb. Indeed God's care for the children of His covenant people is inherent in the covenant itself (Gen. 17:7; 18:19; Ex. 34:7, "who keeps loving-kindness for thousands [of generations]"), so it is hardly surprising that it would figure in the worship of the covenant people.

Collins then adds a point of clarification:

> This means the "I" of the psalm is not "everyman" as such, but "every believing member of the covenant people" (and in context these were raised in covenant homes). Of course the Old Testament agrees with the New Testament in insisting that mere *external* membership in the covenant people is not sufficient: there must be the inner reality of faith, love, and loyalty toward God (without which external membership incurs a more severe judgment).[8]

8. All quotations are from C. John Collins, "Psalm 139:14: 'Fearfully and Wonderfully Made'?" *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review*, 25/2 (Fall 1999), 115–20. In this last quotation, I am not totally comfortable with Collins' internal/external dualism. There no such thing as membership in the people of God that is merely external (e.g., sociological, with no Spiritual implications). That view, however prevalent, fails to reckon with the fact that the visible church is the kingdom of Christ, the house and family of God (WCF 25.2). Nevertheless, Collins' intended point—that church membership is not an automatic guarantee of salvation apart from faith—is entirely appropriate.

Psalm 139 does not contain an explicit reference to the psalmist's paedofaith the way Psalm 22 and Psalm 71 do. However, it is not at all difficult to see the connection between the way David describes his *in utero* experience of grace here with the way it is described elsewhere. Even in the womb the relationship between David and his God is so intimate that it must have been one of mutual faithfulness. It is not simply that God knew (loved) David, but that David knew (loved) God. Surely such knowing and loving on David's part included faith. The covenant distinction that set David apart even in the womb strongly suggests the presence of embryonic trust. How could he be sanctified apart from the work of Spirit? And what prevents the Spirit from working—in even the youngest and most immature—a relationship of trust toward God?[9]

---

9. If we deny this point, we are denying that the new humanity is co-extensive with the old humanity. We would be, in principle, sealing off a sector of God's creation from Christ's redeeming work. A segment of humanity would be placed outside the reach of salvation. If God's plan of redemption involves reclaiming His fallen creation from the curse (cf. Rom. 8:17ff), then humans of every age, station, and ethnicity must be open to receiving salvation, including embryos. Peter Leithart explains this point in terms of the rationale for infant baptism. "Adam sinned, and instead of life and glory, humanity plunged into death and shame. Yet, God did not give up on His original plan to form a human race that would share in His glory and life. He called Abraham to be the father of this race, and Israel became the new humanity. Israel was not merely a "religious" group among other religious groups. Israel was the nation called to live in the presence of the Creator, in communion with the Creator, as all humanity was called to live. Yahweh intended for Israel to be the seed of a new human race. To show that Israel was a new human race and not merely a club for religious people, the infants of Israel, the males, were formally incorporated into Israel. Israel included all sorts and conditions of men—infants, toddlers, teenagers, adults, the elderly—because the human race included all sorts and conditions of men. And Israel was the human race renewed.

"Like Adam, Israel failed to be what the Creator called her to be. And yet God the Creator did not give up on His plan to form a human race that would share in His glory and life. What Israel could not do, weak as she was in the flesh, God did. God sent His Son to become Israel, to do what Israel had not done, to recapitulate the life and history of Israel but to reverse it by living the history of Israel righteously. God's intention in Jesus was His original intention with Adam, to form a new Israel, the truly new human race, through and in the Son of God. And, like Israel, this new Israel includes all sorts and conditions of men—infants, toddlers, teenagers, adults, the elderly—because it is the human

Psalm 139:15 is also interesting in regard to the question of paedofaith. The psalmist speaks of God having "woven" him together in his mother's womb. The verb used here does more than merely indicate that each new conception and gestation is a work of God through created means and processes. This verb is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the making of the veils and curtains that hung in the tabernacle (Ex. 26:36). The covenant infant is woven together, like fine fabric, for holy purposes. The child is already a sacred person (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14), a kind of mini-temple in which God dwells by His Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19). Obviously the child will enter a greater degree of holiness at circumcision/baptism, and will need to grow up into his covenantal status by professing faith and walking in obedience in the years to come. His paedofaith must grow into mature, more fully-actualized adult faith. But the covenant child's starting point should be clear: he belongs to the Lord; he is God's special workmanship; he is a temple of the Holy Spirit; he is a member of the believing covenant people. David's language, including its intertextual resonances, makes no sense apart from the presupposition of paedofaith.

Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is also relevant to our discussion of paedofaith. Here we are dealing with children outside the womb, and David, as the author, regards even nursing babes as warriors in the Lord's army (8:2). Their praise is heard by God and is effective in Israel's holy war. Their inarticulate babblings are accepted by God as beautiful worship and powerful praise.

---

race renewed. The Church, marked out by the water-boundary of baptism, is, theoretically if not actually, coextensive with the human race.

"You see, if you refuse to baptize infants, then you are saying that God's plans have changed. Once upon a time, God intended to form a new human race that would share His life and glory. But that plan failed, so He has now decided to gather together adults who will share in that life and glory.

"Infant baptism, then, is not some extraneous and odd practice of the Church. It is bound up with the whole plan and purpose of God. In baptism, we are retelling the story of the human race, and of God's redemption, which is a fulfillment of creation." From Leithart's website, http://www.leithart.com/archives/001274_print.php. The biblical doctrine of paedofaith is further evidence that the new humanity includes families and nations, not just isolated, matured individuals. (Families and nations include infants, after all!) Paedofaith is just one aspect of a "new humanity" ecclesiology.

Assuming David means what he says, we have to ask: How could these young children praise God without faith? How could they silence the foe and avenger without trusting the Lord? While it may be difficult to explain how nursing babes could be believers, it seems even more difficult to explain how these same children could be so Spiritually active and effective *without* faith! Denying the "problem" of infant faith only creates a larger problem.

This psalm envisions God using even the most helpless and the weakest to bring down His enemies.[10] David mentions babes and nursing infants—obviously a reference to very young children, at least some of whom would not have fully developed speech or intellectual abilities. The spectrum covered by these terms for children ranges from birth to toddler. These two categories are paired up with "the enemy and the avenger." The enemy and the avenger may appear strong, but the Lord uses the verbal, babbling praise of these young covenant children to silence their accusations. God works through the lowliest of the low to bring in His victorious kingdom.

By setting covenant infants in the context of holy war, this psalm also helps us understand the task of Christian parenting. As parents, we must (by faith) view our children as warriors in the Lord's army. They are on active duty even in their infancy, but we must continue to train them to obey their Commander-in-Chief more fully as they mature. They will learn more and more how to wield their weapons, use their defensive armor, and follow out the Captain's battle strategy. But this passage indicates they are conscripted by the Lord from their earliest days; the Lord does not need to wait for them to develop intellectually and physically because He is the one who fights through them. Indeed, young children are some of the best soldiers in the Lord's army precisely because His strength is manifested in their weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). This does not mean their immaturity remains ideal; they must grow up over time, attaining to maturity in Christ. However, it does mean that even before they

10. Obviously, this psalm is ultimately fulfilled in Christ himself. He becomes the nursing babe who defeats the enemies of God through the worship of His Father.

grow they are able to fight. God has already stationed them on the battlefield.

It simply will not do to say that infants here *symbolize* weak adult human beings, as though the babes and infants in Psalm 8:2 only served as metaphors. Such a reading robs the psalm of its force. Besides, it crashes into the New Testament usage of this passage. Matthew 21:12–17 records Jesus' temple cleansing, amidst the cheers of children, portraying the event as a prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 8:2 (among other Old Testament prophesies). In this recasting of Psalm 8:2 the chief priests and scribes are the "enemy and the avenger," whose objections to Jesus are silenced by the praising chorus of children (Mt. 21:15–16). Jesus stops up the mouths of His accusers by pointing to the children who have been crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" These children have identified Jesus as Messiah, the One who brings the Lord's salvation. The Jewish religious leaders are offended by the cry of the children, but Jesus accepts their praise. The arrogant become indignant over the cries of the children, but Jesus is delighted by them. The children manifest a greater degree of Spiritual perception than the priests and scribes, a typical example of a gospel reversal. We are forced to ask: Is our attitude toward children more like Jesus or His enemies? Do we treat their claims to love God as mere lip service or as the fruit of the Spirit's work in them? Are we skeptical of the praises, professions, and experiences of small covenant children? Or do we believe that through such humble means, God has "perfected praise" (Mt. 21:16)?

We also see here another important aspect of training covenant children. The shouts of these children in the temple (Mt. 21:15) echo the praises of the whole multitude during the triumphal entry (Mt. 21:9). The children were part of that multitude, no doubt, and now they are continuing that same form of worship on their own in the temple. This reveals the value of liturgy for children: they can easily memorize repeated prayer forms and make them their own.[11] Jesus does not reject their praises be-

11. Anyone who has read stories to children or played games with them knows firsthand how much they are creatures of habit. G. K. Chesterton rightfully identified love for ritual (and thus liturgy) as a sign of youthful vitality. See his *Orthodoxy* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1990 reprint), 60–61. The symbols and rituals of historic liturgy provide children with a way to "say more than they

cause they were "scripted"—because they used the same language as their elders, rather than their own spontaneous words. Parents should make liturgical routines a part of life for their children so that their children grow up with the great creeds—the Lord's Prayer, the *Doxology*, the *Gloria Patri*, the *Te Deum*, and so on—flowing in their blood. Just as these children had been given the words to use in their praise of God, so we should fill our children's mouths with the language of biblical and traditional worship forms as well. Liturgical patterns of worship are the best way to help our

---

know." They are embodying their faith in a way that leaves room for (and even encourages) growth and development. They are (perhaps subconsciously) learning to identify themselves with the community of faith and its traditions. A wellcrafted liturgy evokes a sense of mystery, awakens the imagination, and gives a sense of connection to something bigger than the individual self. Eastern Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann, in a document available at http://www.schmemann .org/byhim/childrenandchurch.html, captures well the way in which liturgy appeals to children. "As a general rule, children like attending Church, and this instinctive attraction to and interest in Church services is the foundation on which we must build our religious education. When parents worry that children will get tired because services are long and are sorry for them, they usually subconsciously express their concern not for their children but for themselves. Children penetrate more easily than do adults into the world of ritual, of liturgical symbolism. They feel and appreciate the atmosphere of our church services. The experience of Holiness, the sense of encounter with Someone Who is beyond daily life, that *mysterium tremendum* that is at the root of all religion and is the core of our services is more accessible to our children than it is to us. 'Except ye become as little children,' these words apply to the receptivity, the open-mindedness, the naturalness, which we lose when we grow out of childhood. How many men have devoted their lives to the service of God and consecrated themselves to the church because from childhood they have kept their love for the house of worship and the joy of liturgical experience! Therefore, the first duty of parents and educators is to 'suffer little children and forbid them not' (Mt. 19:14) to attend church. It is in church before every place else that children must hear the word of God. In a classroom the word is difficult to understand, it remains abstract, but in church it is in its own element. In childhood we have the capacity to understand, not intellectually, but with our whole being, that there is no greater joy on earth than to be in Church, to participate in Church services, to breathe the fragrance of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is 'the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit.' " Of course, parents who (rightly) seek to include their children in the Church's worshipping assemblies should remember that the point is not merely to have the children in the room with us, but to train them in the skills of authentic worship (e.g., to learn to sing, to say the scripted responses, to say the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, etc.), as Schmemann suggests.

children offer "perfect praise." These forms will give their youthful faith something solid to feed upon for the rest of their lives.[12]

Psalm 8:2, especially as it is used in Matthew 21, gives us an example of paedofaith in action. Here we have small children young enough to still be nursing, yet the feeble praise they offer is not only accepted by God, it is used by Him to topple the enemies of His kingdom. It may be praise offered in a form of words given to them in the liturgy, but it is regarded as sincere nonetheless. Plus, in the light of the New Testament appropriation of this psalm, we can say these small children are able to recognize Jesus and know Him (in some form or fashion) as the Davidic King and Savior. They know the One they are worshipping by faith; by faith their praises are made acceptable.

This may not be paedofaith in the strictest sense (since at least some of the children here are a bit older), but it is fully compatible with the more explicit references to paedofaith seen elsewhere in the Psalter earlier in our survey. God holds small covenant children in high regard. He encourages and receives their praise. This hospitable, welcoming attitude toward covenant children on the part of God is a model for us.

Psalms 127 and 128

The final pieces of evidence we will consider are derived from Psalms 127 and 128. Here, children given to covenant-keeping parents are called "a heritage from the Lord" and a "reward" (127:3). In other words, one way God blesses the godly is with godly offspring. These

---

12. Liturgy is also of great pastoral use for the elderly. Indeed, liturgical worship is perhaps the best form of cradle-to-grave pastoral care churches can give their people. In the liturgy, we learn the faith as nursing babes as we are taught the language of orthodoxy in set, ritualized forms (confessions, catechisms, creeds, hymns, psalms, prayers, etc.). By faith, these fixed patterns shape our minds and hearts and become woven in the very fabric of our being. They strengthen the fibers of community life and enable us to make orthodox devotion the very environment we inhabit. As life's end draws near, decades of liturgical worship stockpiled in our memory enable us to die with the faith still on our lips. For a wonderful, highly anecdotal look at liturgy's enduring value in the life of the Christian, see Robert Zagore's article, "Serving Us Until Our Dying Breath," available at http://mypage.direct.ca/j/jlove/tchissues/tch0398.htm. For a more sweeping defense of liturgy, see Jeffery Meyers' *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003).

children come from God; He is the builder of the house of the faithful (cf. 127:1). The godly man does not need to stay up late worrying about how to guard his children or scheming ways to provide for his house; instead, he should sleep in peace, trusting the Lord's sure provision and protection (127:1–2). Covenant children are a gift, not a burden, to the man who lives by faith in the Lord and in godly fear. Indeed, the great hope of the righteous is to see the faith passed on from one generation to the next, on into the future (128:6). Covenant succession is one of the ultimate blessings of the covenant. It is considered normative.

The godly man finds in his own children a reward from the Lord, but what kind of reward would God be giving if these children did not come with a covenant promise that included their faith? The children given to the godly are like arrows in the quiver of the warrior (127:4–5). They are on the faithful side of the covenantal antithesis. The godly man does not have children in order to fill Satan's forces or populate hell, but in order to reclaim the earth for the kingdom of God as warriors in the great cosmic battle of history.

Here, as in Psalm 8, the covenantal nature of the child and the task of Christian parenting are seen to mesh together fully. The children God gives are an inheritance and a reward, meaning they are His special gift and blessing. Even in the womb, before they can do anything useful for God or humanity, they are regarded as great treasures. Again, martial imagery is used: they are warriors contending with the enemy in the city gate. They are weapons with which to fight the wicked. As in Psalm 8, covenant children are already regarded as participants in the great holy war of history. Covenant children are arrows aimed at the heart of the enemy. If parents shoot them with faith-homed accuracy, they will hit the target and strike a blow for the cause of the gospel.[13]

Psalm 128 adds horticultural imagery to this picture. Covenant children are like olive plants gathered around the table. This makes parents gardeners. Parents are not given weeds for children who must then be converted into wholesome plants. Rather, they are given the best possible plants to work with. They are to care for and nurture these

13. Unlike Psalm 8, nothing is said here of the age of the children in view. But in light of Psalm 8, there is no reason to limit the reference to grown children.

plants in the greenhouses of home and church until the children are mature, fruit-bearing trees. The family culture is to incubate these precious plants in a context of holy joy and fellowship.

Why are the children of the God-fearing man called olive plants? Olive plants were the holiest of all vegetation in the old covenant symbolic system.[14] The olive tree itself was a regular image of the covenant people (Rom. 11:16–24) and the temple of God, especially the Holy of Holies (Zech. 4; Rev. 11:4).[15] The oil flowing through the plant was a symbol of the Holy Spirit.[16] Jesus' ministry climaxed in an Olivet environment.[17] In God's view our children are not weeds, but the holiest plants in the garden. They belong to the covenant community, the royal priesthood, the new temple, and are filled with the oil of the Spirit.

---

14. Some Jewish traditions regarded the Tree of Life in Eden as an olive tree. The olive branch is a symbol of peace and new creation (Gen. 8:11). Olives had a wide variety of uses in Israelite culture, including liturgical usage. They were among the most highly valued plants in the ancient orient. Interestingly, in order to reach their full potential, olives must be pruned regularly. References to olives abound throughout the Scriptures as well as in Christian art and poetry.

15. Symbolically, the temple was an olive grove (cf. Ps. 52:8). The Holy of Holies was guarded by olive trees (cf. 1 Ki. 6:23–24), symbolic of priests.

16. Harvested olive oil was used in anointing which symbolized the outpouring of the Spirit on a person or object (Ex. 30:22–33). The Spirit's association with olive oil also traces back to Genesis 8:11 when the dove carried an olive branch back to Noah. Olive oil was used in the offerings of the Levitical sacrificial system as well.

17. Jesus' ministry peaked on the Mount of Olives, a grove of olive trees. From this location, an ad hoc "Holy of Holies," He pronounced final judgment on the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Mt. 24; Ezek. 10–11). Olives were in the Garden of Gethsemane (the olive press; cf. Mt. 26:30) as well, and it is likely that Jesus was crucified on an olive tree (cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; etc.) since Golgotha was located on the Mount of Olives (cf. Zech. 14:4). Symbolically this placed Jesus in the Holy of Holies as He completed His earthly ministry, since the innermost sanctuary was symbolically an olive grove (cf. 1 Ki. 6:23–24). In the resurrection, Mary Magdalene confused Jesus with the olive-gardener, but of course, in a very real sense, she was exactly right: as a new Adam, in the olive garden, He will tend to the olive tree of His people, the new covenant temple (cf. Jn. 19:41; 20:15; see also Rom. 11:16ff). Finally, Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). Olive trees are linked with heavenly access. All this should factor into what it means to regard our children as olive plants gathered around the familial "holy of holies," the kitchen table.

Note that these plants are gathered around the *table* (128:3). This is a family that eats meals together. It is not a family in which each member centers life on something that takes him or her outside of the home at any and every possible moment. It is an environment of shared fellowship and shared meals and shared lives. It is a family that embraces and embodies the covenant relations they share. It is a family in which the slogan is (as Thomas Howard, and now Douglas Wilson, have put it), "My life for yours."[18] The wife/mother is held in especially high esteem as the heart of the house (128:3). She is a fruitful vine, and her fruits certainly include their children. While it is *his* house, she is the primary shaper of the family culture, the heartbeat of its life and the source of its joy. This is the meaning of the vine image (obviously pointing to wine, the fruit of the vine, which makes the hearts of men glad; cf. Ps. 104:15; Song of Songs 1:2, 4; 4:10; 7:9, etc.).

The parental task, then, in light of Psalms 127 and 128, is to receive our children as gifts from the Lord, giving thanks for them and getting to work with them. The vocation of the Christian parent is to rejoice in his heritage (127:3; 128:2–3) and to make sure he does not squander his inheritance by failing to nurture his children unto maturity. He is to continually equip and strengthen his children for battle, so they will not be ashamed when they confront their enemies face-to-face in the city gate. Parents should make these young arrows ever sharper and straighter, aiming them more and more accurately at the enemies of God. They should fertilize and nurture the holy olive plants in the garden of their homes until they grow up to maturity, bearing fruit for the Lord.

There is not a hint in these texts that our children need to undergo a conscious conversion experience before they can be regarded as arrows or olives. Indeed, the lack of any such reference indicates our children should be regarded as belonging to the Lord by faith from infancy onward. God does not reward us with unclean, unbelieving children; He gives us an inheritance and reward of children who relate to Him in a posture of trust from the very outset of their lives. Because covenant

18. See Thomas Howard, *Splendor in the Ordinary* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2000), and Douglas Wilson, *My Life for Yours* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2004). Both of these books are excellent, highly practical studies of family culture.

children are given Spirit-wrought faith, they are a blessing and not a curse to us.

Conclusion

What conclusions can we draw from the Psalter as a whole? Several major points stand out. Even though the Psalter is the encyclopedia of Christian experience, it *nowhere* catalogs a covenant child having a conversion experience. It *does* record explicit and implicit cases of paedofaith. David has many momentous, wrenching experiences, but a revivalist-style conversion experience is not among them. The Psalter treats infant trust not as a sporadic, occasional, or unpredictable reality, but as the norm in covenant children. God gives us believing children to work with and nurture. In this way, covenant children are a blessing and a reward from the Lord. As we help them grow to mature faith, we fulfill the purpose of the cross-generational covenant promises. The psalmist has many remarkably deep, vivid, datable, and narratable experiences of God's grace, but he still maintains he was a believer from infancy; he trusted in God and knew Him from the very beginning of life. In this way, the Psalter norms Christian experience for the child growing up in a Christian environment. The experience of the psalmist should be the experience of our offspring. Our children belong to Christian homes and, like David, should learn to regard themselves as believers from infancy onward, not necessarily on the basis of experience, but as a corollary of the covenant promises.

Further, covenant children should be nurtured in the faith all along the way from infancy forward to young adulthood. They should learn to view their prior experiences of God's grace (such as God's care for them in the womb and at birth) as a sign of His continued commitment to them into the future. They should be trained in liturgical worship forms so they can silence God's enemies through prayer and praise. They should be regarded as fellow soldiers in the Lord's army, graciously conscripted by their participation in the covenant promises and enlisted through the sacrament of initiation (circumcision/baptism). They are olive plants, meaning they are holy guardians in God's sanctuary, filled with the oil of anointing, namely, the Spirit of peace and

re-creation. They are God's reward and inheritance through which He builds up the houses of the faithful.

We should not be skeptical of their Spiritual experiences and their feeble worship; instead, we should expect them to live in an environment wholly conditioned by God's grace and truth. They are awesomely distinguished even from the womb as God weaves them together into a holy dwelling place for His Son and Spirit; they are sharp arrows aimed at the hearts of God's enemies; they are a heritage from the Lord and a great reward to the faithful; they are model soldiers and worshippers in the Lord's liturgical army. This is the Psalter's theology of covenant children.