

A Theology of Children (CBC 5/20/07)

Introduction

There's a crying need for a biblical theology of children. Our culture overflows with wrong notions of who children are. Most commentators in our society, it seems, assume that children are *tabulae rosae* who merely need to be fed the correct data. Right information in, right product out. Of course, as the parents' and the educators' view of what the right product should be becomes more and more antithetical to the Bible, children are reared in increasingly ungodly fashions. But parents are continually frustrated as well: we put the right data in, sent them to the best schools, did all the right activities, etc., and still we didn't get the right product out. Why?

Christian families are not immune to these cultural traps. The church has lost its view of who the children of Christian parents are and how they should be reared. Of course, there are Christian how-to manuals, showing how parents should rear their children. Some of these workbooks are more helpful than others, but most of them are built on an implicit assumption about the nature of our children and how therefore to parent them.

Baptists are not immune to unbiblical notions of our children. We know that our children are not saved because they are *our* children; they must be born again. We know that our churches must be pure bodies of regenerate members; but how many of our churches discipline rebellious teenagers? We see that huge numbers of our children who join the church walk away from the church and from the Lord later in life. And very often the church is complicit in her silence.

There are, therefore, many problems in our understanding of children. The place to begin is not with "how tos" that will quickly patch over some problems. We are convinced that right practice flows from right theology. The crying need for us as parents and as churches is to develop a biblical theology of children. Only then can we as parents and as churches understand better how we should rear, discipline, evangelize, and disciple our children.

Where to begin?

Creation—Fall—Redemption

This is a classic, and a very biblical way, to do theology. It provides a nice structure to think about our children.

Creation (i.e., our children and who they are as created human beings)

Several points flow from this truth:

- 1) God is their creator; he is their Lord

We parents need to remember we are not God in relation to our children

- 2) As created, our children have dignity and worth that separates them from all of God's other creation

Parents are responsible to steward our children, remembering that they are precious to the Lord as his special creation

- 3) Children, as humans, are created in the image of God

This means that they are able to know and love the Lord; they will live eternally (either in heaven or in hell)

Application:

Parents should not abuse (in any way) or belittle or neglect those who are in God's image; rather, they should view them as fellow image bearers who are of great worth and precious in God's sight

Fall (i.e., our children are sinners)

- 1) The image is shattered

So our children are out of God's favor (because of original sin and their actual transgressions)

And they are now under God's wrath because of their sins

- 2) Means that their affections, motivations, and thinking are out of sync with God
- 3) Yet they still in God's image, and therefore can still know God and be forgiven by him

Application

Parents must recognize the sinful tendencies of their kids (original sin)

And they must discipline them because of their sin (not primarily because the children's sin annoys the parents!)

Purpose of discipline?

- a) to show that sin will be punished (by God; hell)
- b) to restrain greater sin
- c) to preach the gospel to children when explain that God will punish sin—and, more importantly, that there is forgiveness in the gospel (when you reconcile with the child)
- d) to train our children in behavior that pleases God—e.g., obey parents, love others

The most important thing we do as parents is preach the gospel and live it out to our children and pray for them—eternity is in the balance

Redeemed (i.e., our children as Christians)

If they repent and trust in Christ they are ...

Still in the image of God

Now are completely new creatures—i.e., their affections are now re-oriented so that they love God

Yet, they are also children—i.e., they are immature

This means that they aren't perfect (no Christian is), but more than that it means that they are maturing and therefore will make some silly decisions

But this doesn't mean that they're unregenerate—it just means that they're maturing

As Christians, they still have indwelling sin and will continue to struggle with sin in their lives (as we all do)

Application

Parents must help redeemed kids to grow in Christ

Parents, and the church, must be aware that there may be false testimonies

Parents must be patient when kids still sin—or when they act immaturely