

# Baptism Sermon - A Family Nurtured Under God's Love

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[ 0 : 00 ]     The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

Today, we are here to be witnesses to, and participants in, those who are coming with their children for baptism, the sacrament of baptism.

As a church, we practice infant baptism, persuaded that infant baptism has its roots deep in the Old Testament and in Old Testament covenant theology.

The principle of baptism, as of circumcision, is that it is a sign and also a seal of belonging to the covenant community of God's people.

[ 1 : 09 ]     It's a sign of the covenant, as we read about circumcision in chapter 17, just a few moments ago. That carries over into the New Testament, where baptism is also a sign and a seal of that covenant, of God's blessing.

It doesn't necessarily convey that blessing. It doesn't mean that those who are baptized, whether as adults or children, that baptism is an infallible sign, that they are converted, that they are the Lord's people.

But it is a sign and a seal of God's promises to all who will come to trust in him. In other words, as we look at our own baptism and the fact that we are baptized, if we're baptized today, whether we're baptized as adults or as children, looking at that baptism and what it signifies means that if we indeed walk in the ways of the Lord and trust in him, the Lord will fulfill the promises that are part of his covenant blessings for his people that are signified and shown forth by baptism.

Now, I know that our Baptist friends will disagree with some of that theology, and that has always been the case down through the years and generations where there is a difference of opinion as to baptism in the time it's administered and the mode even of its administration.

I'm not going to go into that at all today. It's just a fact of history, and it's important for both sides that they actually follow what they believe and that that's what we're doing today.

[ 2 : 49 ]     So, instead of any of that matter itself, we're looking today at family nurture under God's love, because that's really what this verse is setting out for us. This is God's word about Abraham, and to Abraham indeed as well. The Lord said to Abraham, I have chosen him that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

In other words, God is assuring Abraham and assuring those who are going to come after Abraham, his descendants, that he's going to continue to bless them in terms of his covenant promises and blessings, and that that is something Abraham can take with him and teach his children. And this is indeed an assurance that he will do so, something that has come to emanate from God's love, which has settled on Abraham, as we'll see in a moment. Now, you notice the setting here, and that's very important.

The setting here for these words is in the middle of a passage that's dealing with God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain at that time. And it's very significant that this is actually set there in that context, where God has said to Abraham, this is what is going to happen to these cities, and that he must in fact prepare to make arrangements in regard to that. And what God is saying to Abraham basically in here is that this is really, in a sense, the light of God's grace, as it sits in between passages dealing with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here is really situated there, just snugly in there, if you like, an assurance of God's grace, a bright light of God's saving grace, of God's covenant love, just in case we should misunderstand what God is and who he is and what he's like. That he's nothing more than a God of judgment, a God who punishes sin, a God who deals with the likes of the world of Sodom and Gomorrah in terms of their destruction.

There is that to it, but here is God saying, this is my covenant with my people. It doesn't matter what's going on elsewhere in the world. It doesn't matter what destruction is going on around them. It doesn't matter how. I may at times need to display my judgment of sin. This is my promise to my people.

This is the light of my grace. This is the warmth of my love. And for all of us today, that's surely a special emphasis. It doesn't matter what's going on around you in the world. I'm saying it doesn't matter in the sense that it's not going to interfere with us. It matters, of course, to us that people are living in sin and people are not following the Lord. I'm not saying it doesn't matter in that regard.

[ 5 : 50 ] But this is the important thing for us today in regard to the assurance that God gives to all who trust in them individually and in their family lives. This is what is true of them, that God will be their God as they continue to live as his people. So what is it we find then in this verse today that's of importance to us and of relevance in regard to baptism as we're going to see baptism shortly at the end of our service? Well, the two things we want to mention are, first of all, Abraham, you can see here, is loved by God. That's the root of it. Abraham is loved or has been loved by God, but continues to be loved by God. This is what God is saying, for I have chosen him.

That word chosen, in some translations, in the older translations certainly, it's the word know. I know him, or I have known him. And that's probably a better translation, because, as we'll see, in that sense of the word know, as used in the Bible, it brings in closeness of relationship, intimacy of relationship, indeed, a loving relationship. So that's the first thing.

Abraham has been loved by God and is loved by God. Second thing is the resulting benefit for Abraham and his family. I have known him, I know him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. You see, that's the order. God loves Abraham. God continues to love Abraham.

And in God's love for Abraham, he makes provision for him, for the teaching of his children, for the rearing of his children, so that through that, the promises of God to Abraham come to be fulfilled. That's the pattern. That's the sequence towards God fulfilling his promises for him.

But let's look, first of all, at God having loved Abraham and continuing to love him. For I have chosen him. Now, as I've said, the word know is really literally the word you find in the Hebrew text there of Genesis. For I know him, or I have known him. And what's important about that word is that the Bible uses it in terms of a loving, indeed of an intimacy of relationship. If you go back to chapter 4 of Genesis, you'll see it used there at the beginning of chapter 4, where you see Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain. You see, that's saying there's the most intimate part of a marriage relationship that leads to children being conceived and ultimately born. That's the word that's used there of Adam and Eve, his wife. Adam knew Eve, his wife. That doesn't mean Adam knew all about her. Adam knew who she was. None of that. It means in the intimacy of that married relationship, through that intimacy, through that union, a child comes to be conceived.

[ 8 : 57 ] And if you take that meaning, that intimate love meaning of the word know into this context in Genesis 18, this is what God is saying about Abraham. For I know him. I have entered into the closest relationship of love with him. I have come to love him. My love has settled upon him. Different ways you could say this, but it really means essentially God has loved Abraham. God's love has come to settle the word chosen. The word chosen is not necessarily wrong, because it includes the idea of Abraham having been chosen by God, but it's chosen in his love. What is it that led to Abraham being a man of God? It was the fact that God loved him, and because God loved him, he chose him, and because he chose him, he called him out of the place he was living in to follow him. Chapter 12, beginning, now the Lord said to Abraham, go out from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. There's the beginning of things for Abraham. God's love has come to settle upon him, come to single him out, if you like, has come to choose him. But the whole emphasis is on the fact that God has initiated this wonderful relationship where now Abraham stands in a close, intimate, loving relationship with God. That's why parental faith is so significant in the

Bible. And that's why parental faith, as it comes from God's love toward us, where God loves his people, where God settles on them in his love, where God calls them by his love to be his people, where God singles them out, where God makes them different in that respect to the people around them who don't love him, who don't trust in him. That's exactly what's happening here in this text. I know him. I've come to know him. I've entered into this loving relationship with him, with him. And it's that that underlies Abraham's nurturing of his family. It's not that Abraham has come to love God or has chosen to love God. He does that. He does love the Lord. He does revere the Lord. He follows the Lord. That's not the root of his nurturing of his family. That's not the basis. That's not what's foundational to the nurturing of his family. It's actually God's love for him. For I know him, says God. I have come to love him so that he may command his children after him. That's why it's so significant for ourselves as families too in covenant with God.

That how much we love the Lord, as we trust we do. That's not what's foundational to our nurturing of our children if we're privileged and blessed to have children. And not every couple are blessed with having children. That's something that the Lord himself and his wisdom establishes. But it's a blessing to have children nonetheless. And in that regard, we look to the love of God, to God's provision in his love, to the fact of his love, to his ongoing love. For I know him, is what God is saying of Abraham. And today I would say to myself, I would say to parents here who are bringing children for baptism and all of us who have children to nurture for the Lord. That's really what must be of basic importance to us. That we know the Lord's love for us. That we value the Lord's love for us. That we actually build upon the love that God has for his people. And that in following that out, we do love him in return. So God loved Abraham. Secondly, the result of that, the resulting benefit for Abraham and his family. Now if we take the translation again, for I know him, that he may command. The word that really means so that. It's not just saying that God knows Abraham and that he knows this is what Abraham will do. What he's saying is that because of the thing that God's knowing of

Abraham is, because the nature of God's love is what it is, it guarantees what Abraham is going to do. For I know him so that he will actually bring up his family and nurture his family in this way.

It's not that God knows all that Abraham will do for his children and teach his children and nurture his children. What this text is telling us is that God's love and God's knowing and God's choice of Abraham itself directly leads to Abraham nurturing his children in this way. That's the connection.

[ 13 : 59 ] Where God settles in his love upon any particular person or people, there's a result to that. There's a consequence of that. There's an inevitable fruit of that, if you like, in the way they live their lives. And for Abraham, this is the result of God loving him. The result of God having chosen him in love. It guarantees that he will command his children and his household after him. That's, you see, how basic, how foundational, how important the love, the covenant love of God is. Because it is that foundational influence, the result of which is that Abraham will bring up his family in a particular way. And how is it that he's going to bring up his family? If it's a case of God having loved him, which then results in this, what kind of thing is it that Abraham is said here to do as a result of that? Well, first of all, that he may command his children. God, you see, is placing the children of Abraham under his own direct leadership. God is not saying to him, I am your God. I'm the God of your household. Therefore, your responsibilities don't really amount to very much. You don't have to bother about bringing up your children in any particular way.

What God is saying is, I love him so that he will do this, so that he will command his children. And of course, that word command is something that's not necessarily popular today.

It's the same you have in the New Testament. We're in Ephesians chapter 4, sorry, Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4. You remember the words there. I think we used it at a previous baptism.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the nurture and discipline of the Lord. In other words, it's saying to families, to couples with children, the primary responsibility of their upbringing in the ways of the Lord lies with their father. If the father isn't there, it lies with their mother. It certainly lies with their parents. But primarily, the emphasis in the Bible is with the father in the family. That's where God has placed the emphasis first and foremost. That's what he's saying in regard to Abraham as well. He's not going to be absolved from his responsibilities. And in fact, he has the primary responsibility. Now, the fact that we have children coming here today to be part of this church service is a wonderful thing. The fact they come to tweenies, they come to creche, they come to Sunday school, they come to other group activities as well as they grow up in years and on into adolescence and adulthood. What a wonderful thing it is. And we're blessed with having so many young families, so many children. But it's not the nurture of our children. The primary responsibility for that does not lie with the church.

It does not lie with the Sunday school. It doesn't lie with youth leaders. Important though these are Sunday school youth leaders. It lies with those themselves who are parents to bring the children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That's why one of the questions put at a baptism is whether you will promise to bring up this child in the nurture and discipline of the Lord because it's recognizing the teaching of Scripture in regard to where the primary responsibility lies.

[ 17 : 43 ] And it is a wonderful blessing to have that responsibility onerous though it might be. And it's a wonderful blessing for us as a congregation to know that parents are indeed carrying out the responsibilities properly in the Lord to rear their children in the ways of the Lord. But he is using this word command. That's to a very important emphasis. I know him. I have loved him so that he may command his children. And you can see from this there's this is very far this is very different distant from the idea that well children really by and large should be left to make up their own minds about religion, about Jesus, about God, about how to live their lives. We just give them certain moral directions and then they use these and make up their own minds as to whether to follow the Lord or not or whether to go to church or not. It's not what you find in this passage is it? That's a very strong word, the word command. It doesn't mean that we force things into their minds as we're accused very often of of being people who indoctrinate our children as if secularists or atheists didn't indoctrinate theirs.

But if it's indoctrination, and indoctrination just means essentially teaching people certain principles, certain doctrines. That's where the word comes from. If we're today accused of indoctrinating our children by teaching them the ways of the Lord, then I accept that indoctrination. It's commanded by God.

It's something that doesn't call upon us to force things upon people and restrict their lives in the way that we're accused of doing, but in a loving and tactful and patient way. We command our children.

We instruct them in a way that says this is actually what God requires. This is what children themselves are required to do. And that's why in Ephesians again, chapter 6, we quote it from fathers, don't exasperate your children. Don't provoke them to wrath. Don't provoke them to anger. It's really don't exasperate them. Don't expect them to be other than children, in other words. But it begins, that chapter begins by a word to the children. Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. For this is right. And so we have to teach our children not only the ways of the Lord and how to keep the ways of the Lord and what God requires of us, but the fact that that is right for them to accept that teaching from their parents when the parents are faithful to what the Lord himself has laid upon them. So there's that word command. I know him that he may command his children. And what is he going to command his children? Well, he's going to command his children and his household, not just his children directly, but his household to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. You see, that's his primary concern. Here is God saying, I know Abraham. I have loved him. I continue to love him.

I make provision in my love for him. I've entered into covenant with him in my love. I have my love settled upon him. So that the result of that is he will teach, he will command his children, and he will command them to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. The primary concern is to honor God, to serve God, to be a people of God for themselves as they grow up, these children, these people of his household, to be true to God. And you see, there's for us today a reminder to ourselves as adults as well, that in our adult lives, this too is our primary concern or should be. This is what we pass on to our children, but this is what they must see in ourselves. How do we expect them just to take our word if they're not also seeing it backed up by our example? And our example has to be what our words teach them to keep the way of the Lord. In other words, that covers the whole of life. The way of the Lord is not just fulfilled by church attendance, by worshiping God together, or by having worship for God in your homes, which is something, of course, which is important and commendable as well. The ways of the Lord extend throughout every branch of our human life, of all our activities, what we are in our relationships, what we are in our marriages, what we are as parents, what we are as grandparents, what we are in our work, what we are in our society around us, what we are in relation to the world around us, how people see us, what people think of us.

[ 22 : 47 ] The ways of the Lord, the way of the Lord. The way of the Lord means being faithful to Him, being true to Him in every activity of life. Individually, corporately, as families, as households, as congregations, as a church.

This is today our privilege. We know the way of the Lord. He teaches us His way through the Scriptures. We have that example set for us by others who have gone before us, whom we knew as people of the Lord, who are true to God, who love the Lord, who serve the Lord. That's in our memories, backing up what we have in the Scripture itself, though the Scripture is sufficient, even without that. Today, this is what he's saying about Abraham, and it follows into our own experience and application. I have chosen, I know Him, so that He may command His children and His household after Him to keep the way of the Lord. I have to fit everything into that as a Christian. All that I am in myself, privately between myself and God. I have to fit my marriage into that. I have to fit my family life into that. I have to fit my relationship with people outside of my family into that. I have to fit my family into that. I have to fit my recreations into that. It's that comprehensive. The way of the Lord, the way that God requires me to live and to be for Him, faithful to the Lord. Well, that's what Abraham, that's what the result of God's love is in

Abraham's life. I have loved him so that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord. It's interesting, when you go through the account you have of Abraham's life in Genesis, for example, if you go back to chapter 12, there's a passage there which really illustrates this very well, chapter 12, verses 6 to 9, where you find Abraham there traveling as God has called him out of his own native place. Abraham passed through the land at verse 6 of chapter 12 to the land, to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, to your offspring I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord who appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abraham journeyed on. And the impression you get from that, indeed, it's more than an impression.

It's really a fact of Abraham's life. Wherever he went, he built an altar to the Lord. As he moved on through this land, he built these altars to the Lord. And you know, I think that's one of the reasons you find that comment there at the end of verse 6. You sometimes wonder, well, why is such a comment there? Why are these things in the Bible? It seems to be just a matter-of-fact thing in the way of passing. The Canaanites were then in the land. Well, this was the land of the Canaanites. This was the land of the Canaanites with their religion, with their abhorrent religion, with all its abhorrent practices. And here is Abraham coming into this land under God's direction and with God's command.

What does he do? He sets up altars for the Lord. He gives an alternative to the religion of the Canaanites. He begins to establish these places of worship for the true and living God.

[ 26 : 28 ] That's really what the Christian life's about, isn't it? Not just as individuals, but in our family lives as well. What are we doing? Well, we're traveling, as it were, through this world, and we're establishing these places for God. We're establishing these family units for God as we try to be ourselves as families for God so that in the midst of all that's around us that is ungodly, that is anti-godly, there are these units that if they increase, and that's our prayer, that more and more children, more and more families, more and more adults will come to commit themselves to the ways of the Lord. You see what's happening? The influence of the Canaanites would gradually be overtaken by the influence of Abraham's faith and his religion. And think of your own life today as a Christian family, or as an individual Christian, walking in the ways of the Lord. It's effectively establishing an altar for God in the midst of a degenerate society. And you know, the more that happens, the more it spreads and increases the kingdom of Christ. The more we actually live for the Lord, the more the Lord blesses us. That's what really is built into this whole emphasis of keeping the way of the Lord. And it's by doing righteousness and justice, just so that we would be quite clear about what the way of the Lord includes. It's by doing righteousness and justice. And I think we could, we could take that really as our life in regard to our relationship to God, a life of righteousness, a life that seeks to be holy, and as he is holy, and justice, that you could say that that really is our life as it bears upon and relates to other people like ourselves. So whether you think of the upward Godward direction of our life, righteousness, or the horizontal relationship, if you like, the horizontal in terms of our relationship with other people, this is what the people of the Lord are required to be and to do. To keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. Being true to God, being true to his calling, being true to his requirements.

And that teaching is to be given by Abraham to his children and household after him. And all of these points that I've mentioned, the instruction, the command, the way of the Lord, bringing before our children, the teaching of God's word, the importance of their baptism, what it signifies, what we learn ourselves from the Bible, from teaching we receive about the Bible, so we pass that on to them. We do it from their youngest days onwards. And that's so important, because all those influences out there are going to be seeking to get into the thinking and the actions of your children and my children from their very youngest days. And you have to counteract that. Not just counteract it, but overcome it. How do you do it? By the truth of God, by the way of God. One of the famous preachers of

Victorian times, Charles Spurgeon, we often take quotations from Spurgeon. He's many people's favorite author. You can read his sermons, of course, very readily. And he says, on a shelf, he said, in my grandmother's kitchen was an apple in a glass bottle. It filled up the inside of the bottle.

And I wondered, how could that apple have been put into the bottle? I climbed up a chair one time to see if the bottom would unscrew, or if there had been a join in the glass down the length of the bottle. But no, there was nothing like that. So the apple remained a mystery to me. How did it happen?

Well, he said, one day, I was walking in my grandmother's garden. And I saw a bottle hanging on a tree. And inside it was a tiny little apple, which was growing inside the bottle. Now I knew how it had been done. The apple had been put into the bottle when it was little. And it grew there from then on.

[ 31 : 23 ] There is our privilege as parents, as grandparents, bringing our children up to know the ways of the Lord. It's like that little apple to begin with, so tiny, put into the bottle, then it begins to grow.

Think of it that way. You begin to teach your children the ways of the Lord. It's a very small influence to begin with. Their capacity is small to begin with. But very soon, it begins to grow.

Their knowledge begins to grow. Their understanding of the ways of the Lord begins to grow. And so, within the bottle, if you like, of God's covenant, our children come to be nurtured in the ways of the Lord and to grow for themselves, to appreciate what it means to be the Lord's, to be the Lord's people.

And you see, that's the outcome there, that this is the way that, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. Let me just finish with that. Now, you see, that's the pattern.

God loved Abraham. Abraham obeyed. Abraham was then, from that, able to teach his children and his household after him. And they came into the ways of the Lord to keep the ways of the Lord. That's the pattern. It's not Abraham's obedience first that led to God approving him. It's God's love first that led to Abraham's obedience and then Abraham's teaching of his children. It's not God doing everything for him. It's not God acting without Abraham's faith. It's not Abraham's faith acting on its own without God. God first. Abraham follows. His children follow after that. That's the pattern.

[ 33 : 16 ] That's our privilege under the gospel too. And I hope today that all of us today, whether we have children or not, or when they're grown up or not, that this is the principle we apply to life.

We look to God's love and the provision he has made in his love, in Jesus Christ. And that following on from that influence, we serve the Lord. And we teach our children and grandchildren the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that we will all together come to know the promises of God being fulfilled in our own experience. May God bless these thoughts to us. Now we're going to sing some verses from Psalm 115. And that's on the Sing Psalms version, page 153. Sing Psalm 115, verses 9 to 15. The tune is Morvan.

O house of Israel, place your trust upon the Lord alone. He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own. O house of Aaron, trust the Lord. He is their help and shield. All you who fear him, trust the Lord. He is your help and shield. We'll sing to the end of 15. If we need to, just for the presenter, if we need to carry on to the end of verse 18, so as to have all the children who are going to join us from tweenies and Sunday school, if we need to sing on, we'll just do that.

So from verse 9, O house of Israel, place your trust. Amen. O house of Israel, place your trust upon the Lord alone. He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own.

O house of Israel, place your trust upon the Lord. He is their help and shield. All you who fear him, trust the Lord. He is your help and shield. He is your help and shield. The Lord remembers Israel, and he will bless us all. The house of Israel, and he will bless us all. The house of Israel, and all those who feel him rich and small.

[ 36 : 54 ] May God the Lord make you in peace, both you and all your life.

May you be blessed by God who makes all things by his design.

Amen.