

# IN RESPONSE - THE COVENANT AND BAPTISM

by Dennis Prutow

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In our previous lesson we determined that the word “baptism” does not mean only dip, plunge, and immerse. Baptism can and does mean “sprinkle.” We verified this from the Bible. We saw that the Old Testament ceremony in which people were cleansed from defilement because they touched a dead body involved the sprinkling of water in which there was mixed the ashes of a red heifer. This sprinkling is specifically called a baptism in Hebrews 9:8-10. The word used in Hebrews 9:10 and translated “washings” (NASV) is the word “baptisms” in the original language. In my estimation, once this hurdle is crossed, once we know that baptism by sprinkling is biblical, the way is cleared to entertain infant baptism.

The next step is to discuss the covenant of grace. We need to see that the covenant of grace is the same in both Old Testament and New Testament. We therefore enter into a study of what we call the unity of the covenant. We maintain that the same promise concerning the Savior and the same faith in the Savior is given to believers in the New Testament as was given to believers in the Old Testament. Galatians 3:8-9 can be used to introduce us to the unity of the covenant.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations shall be blessed in you.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Note first of all that Paul is speaking about the “gospel.” He is talking about the gospel being preached to Abraham. Now if Abraham is indeed the Father of our faith, at some point He must have heard the gospel promise concerning Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul is telling us very forcefully that the gospel was preached to Abraham.

Not only so, it is God Himself who proclaimed the gospel to Abraham. The patriarch did not hear the gospel through the mediation of some human figure. The words of the gospel came to Abraham directly from God.

Digressing, we see here an argument for the Bible as the Word of God. When Paul tells us the Scripture preached the gospel to Abraham, he quotes Genesis 12:3, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” But the words

quoted are the words of God. Paul is testifying that the words of Scripture are the words of God. Put another way, there is no difference between the words recorded in Scripture and the words of God.

But we must now reckon with the fact that Paul calls these words spoken to Abraham the “gospel.” These very words, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” constitute the gospel. This promise given to Abraham and reiterated when Abraham offered up his only son Isaac (Genesis 22:18) is the gospel. This covenant made with Abraham and passed on to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) is the gospel promise. This pledge made by God to Abraham and renewed with his grandson Jacob is the gospel of God. To each of these men God said, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18 & 28:14, margin). To restate it, Paul calls this very promise “the gospel.”

How can the words of this covenant promise be the gospel? Quite simply, Christ is the “seed” in which Abraham and all others must place their trust if they are to have a place in God’s kingdom. The promise to Abraham was, “And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18, emphasis added). Referring specifically to the promises given in Genesis 15:18 and 17:8, the apostle Paul says, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ” (Galatians 3:16). The same argument applies to the gospel promise we have discussed.

The seed in which Abraham is to believe is Jesus Christ. This is the same seed promised by God in the Garden. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Genesis 3:15). We rightly consider these words to be the first gospel promise. They refer to Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman. It is this same seed, Jesus Christ, who must be the object of the faith of men and women if they are to be saved from the clutches of the serpent. The gospel promise came to Abraham in a similar form, “In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 22:18).

Certainly the gospel is in shadow form in this promise. Yet Abraham knew that a Savior was promised. And Abraham knew the Savior would be one of his own descendents. So true is this that Christ himself declares of the patriarch, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). And so true is this that Abraham believed in the resurrection. He would have gone through with the sacrifice of Isaac had the angel of God not forestalled him.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise if that was needed. This was the character of Abraham’s faith.

The point is that Abraham believed in the Savior who was to come. His faith was in the promised seed, Jesus Christ. And the faith which Abraham possessed was resurrection faith. This means that the promise to Abraham was indeed the gospel promise. It means that the resurrection faith exercised by Abraham in the promised seed is the same faith we exercise today in the same gospel with which we are so familiar. We therefore say without reservation that Abraham was saved in exactly the same way believers are saved today. And he was brought into the same covenant relationship with Jesus Christ as believers are today.

Now Abraham was commanded by God to make an outward display of this covenant relationship into which God brought him. “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations” (Genesis 17:11-12). Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant. It was the outward sign of the grace bestowed by God. As Paul tells us, Abraham “received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had while uncircumcised” (Romans 4:11).

But it was not only Abraham whom God commanded should receive the sign of circumcision. The command of God was that “every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations.” Although these male children could not exercise faith in the promised Savior before they were eight days old, God commanded them to be circumcised. These infants were to receive the sign and seal of the gospel promise. It is therefore apparent that God did not believe in only believer’s circumcision. It was by His command that infants received the sign of the gospel in their flesh.

But we have already seen that the gospel promised in the Old Testament is identical to the gospel promised in the New Testament. And so we ask this all important question. Has God set aside the command to place the sign and seal of the gospel promise on infants? Do we find anywhere within the Scriptures of the New Testament where God makes a change and restricts the application of the sign of the covenant to adults only and tells us that infants are excluded from the privilege of receiving the sign and seal of the gospel promise? The answer is, “No!”

And by now the reason should be clear. The gospel is the same in both testaments. The covenant is one and the same in both testaments. It is administered differently in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. But it is the same gospel presented by way of covenant. And since the gospel is the same, there is no requirement to drastically change to whom the gospel sign is to be administered. We therefore maintain that the ordinance of baptism is to be administered to the infant children of believers in accord with the command of God in exactly the same way Abraham administered circumcision to the male infants within his family.

In summary, we saw last time that sprinkling is a legitimate and biblical mode for baptism. This time we verified that the gospel promise of the covenant is the same in both testaments. We also observed that the command to apply the sign of the covenant to infants has not been abrogated. Next time I shall show that baptism replaces circumcision as the sign seal of God’s covenant promise. Then we may fully affirm infant baptism.

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## IN RESPONSE - A REBUTTAL TO KATHY STEGALL, PART II

by Dennis Prutow

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In "Kathy Writes a Reply," *Cornerstones*, Fourth Quarter, 1992, pp. 5-7, we find a recurring theme which warrants comment. This theme involves a feminist interpretation of Paul's words in Galatians 3:28. Paul tells us,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, *there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:26-29, italics added).

The feminist interpretation is given by Mrs. Stegall,

Our gender is purely a physical condition. It is not an indicator of spiritual giftedness.

Yes, we are all different. And some of those differences come from our sex. But these are not the differences that have a bearing on our spiritual gifts or abilities and consequently do not affect our work or "role" in Christ's body, the church.

This is the meaning Paul wants us to take from Galatians 3:28. In Christ we are all one, imaging our Trine God (Colossians 3:10-11). Earthly differences of status and position in society, or physical differences such as race and gender have no significance in the church.

The church is a spiritual body. In that body we are all sons. In that body we are all heirs (Galatians 3:26-29)...<sup>1</sup>

I call this the *feminist* interpretation because that is exactly what it is. Mrs. Stegall makes a point of telling us that *mutual submission* is the standard. "Everyone submits."<sup>2</sup> This line of thinking is also forced upon Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:21.

The feminist approach to Ephesians 5:21 has been that Paul teaches completely mutual submission. The husband submits to the wife just as she submits to him.<sup>3</sup>

My aim is to show that this feminist interpretation is an aberrant view. It fails

to take into account the differences in Scripture which relate to God's *administration of salvation*, on one hand, and the *functions* or *roles* assigned by God within the church, on the other hand. As a result, it places Paul at odds with himself and it makes Paul and the Bible inconsistent.

What is Paul teaching in Galatians 3:26-29? Paul is proclaiming the blessedness of the gospel of grace. He is telling us that our relationship with God is one of grace. We respond to God in faith, the fruit of grace. Paul is emphasizing the fact that *as far as salvation is concerned* there is no merit or demerit in being a particular race, occupation, or gender. Whether you are male or female, slave or free, Jew or Greek, through faith in Jesus Christ, you are a child of God.

Yes, Paul is discussing the narrow subject of belonging to Christ (verse 29) through faith (verse 26) when he says in verse 28,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And as far as our relationship with God through faith in Christ, there is absolutely no distinction between my wife and me. There is no distinction between Mrs. Stegall and me as far as standing before God through faith in Christ. This is Paul's argument.

I consulted several commentaries on Galatians 3:28 to ensure my understanding of the text is correct. Matthew Henry says,

[A]ll who sincerely believe on Christ, of whatever nation, or sex, or condition, soever they be, are accepted of him, and become the children of God through faith in him.<sup>4</sup>

Martin Luther adds,

Indeed the male, the female, the bond, the free, the Jew, the Gentile, the prince, the subject, are the good creatures of God; but in Christ, that is, in the matter of salvation they are nothing, with all their wisdom, righteousness, religion and power.

Note that Luther sees Paul speaking to these distinctions *as they relate to salvation*.

John Eadie makes a similar comment, "Having put on Christ, the woman is a child of God equal to the man in all filial honor and enjoyment." Whether man or woman, when we become members of the family of God, we "have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God"<sup>5</sup> "The point is," as A. T. Robertson declares,

that 'in Christ Jesus' race or national distinctions ('neither Jew nor Greek') do not exist, class differences ('neither bond nor free,' no proletarianism and no capitalism) vanish, sex rivalry ('no male and female') disappears.

Sex rivalry disappears because salvation returns us to our standing in the Garden before the fall.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs. Stegall wants us to believe that the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28 teach us that the differences enumerated "are not the differences that have a bearing on our spiritual gifts or abilities and consequently do not affect our work or 'role' in Christ's body, the church."<sup>7</sup> She unabashedly declares "[P]hysical differences such as race and gender have no significance in the church"<sup>8</sup>

But as we shall see, Paul does draw such distinctions in giving explicit direction to believers. In fact, Paul seeks to maintain the very distinctions Mrs. Stegall repudiates. Earnest Burrton in the *International Critical Commentary* makes a point of this when he says, "The passage has nothing to do directly with the merging of nationalities or the abolition of slavery." On the contrary, Paul has a different aim. As Calvin observes,

His object is to show that the grace of adoption and the hope of salvation do not depend on the law but are contained in Christ alone.

Other commentators such as Henry Alford, Alan Cole, William Hendriksen, J. B. Lightfoot, and Frederic Rendall (EGT) lead us in the same direction.

My point in citing these commentators is to show that Galatians 3:28 refers to the standing of men and women before God *as it has to do with salvation*. Galatians 3:28 does *not* set aside the words of the apostle when he speaks about the *roles* of men and women in the their families or in the church or the roles of slaves and free men within the church.

For example, the distinction between slave and free is not set aside by Paul as having no significance within the church. To the contrary, slaves are given instructions on how to conduct themselves (Ephesians 6:5-8, Colossians 3:22-25). And the runaway slave Onesimus is sent back to his master as a slave and as a brother in Christ (Philemon 10-16). If the distinction between slave and free did not pertain to the church, is not Paul in error in continuing the distinction by giving instruction to slaves? No, Paul is not in error. Mrs. Stegall's position entangles us in the web of contradiction.

More specifically, the statement, "[P]hysical differences such as race and gender have *no significance* in the church" (italics added) is patently false. Physical differences such as gender are of great significance in the church. To make this as graphic as possible, look at Romans 1:26-27.

[T]heir women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

One of the greatest moral errors prevalent within the *unbelieving* world is lesbianism and homosexuality. And Paul is emphatic. As far as the church is concerned, homosexuals shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Why? It is a perversion of the highest order to distort the male female relationship. In the church, the male female distinction must be maintained. Failure to maintain it and distortion of it, by teaching that within the church physical differences in gender have no significance, is great perversity. To say that these distinctions in gender are without significance is to place Paul squarely at odds with himself. More importantly, such a position places Scripture at odds with Scripture. This cannot be. The feminist interpretation of Galatians 3:28 is wrong. It should be abandoned immediately by all serious and thinking Bible believing people.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathy Stegall, "Cornerstones," Fourth Qtr, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> R. C. Sproul. "Tabletalk," March, 1993, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Quotes of commentators may be found under Galatians 3:28 in the respective commentaries.

<sup>5</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question and Answer 34.

<sup>6</sup> Discussed in the November, 1992 issue of 'In Response.'

<sup>7</sup> Stegall, *Op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*