

Child Dedication Service/Sermon (August 19, 2012)

In a few moments several parents from our church are going to publicly dedicate their children to the LORD. They will be making a powerful statement. But I'm also going to ask this congregation and family present to make commitments as well. So, in order to set the stage for this time, I want us to understand what we are doing this morning. I know many of you have been to a child dedication service, and for others this is new. But since it has been a long time since we've done a child dedication service I would like us to answer 2 questions to understand all that's going on. Here are the two questions:

What is a child dedication service and what is not a child dedication service?

I want to answer the second question first: What is not a child dedication service?

- 1) A child dedication service is not Biblically required. There are examples in Scripture where a parent dedicated their child to the LORD. When Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel dedicated him to the LORD, she said: ^{1 Sam. 1:27} *I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him.* ²⁸ *So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.* After Hannah dedicated Samuel to the LORD, she left him at the Lord's tent to continue to serve his whole life. Now, we are not expecting anyone to leave their child at church this morning for the rest of their lives. But the intent of Hannah was to surrender her child unto the LORD's service and to invite God's blessing onto her child's life. This is the kind of dedication we are hoping for. So, first answer to what is not a child dedication? A child dedication is not Biblically required.
- 2) Second, a child dedication service is not salvific. That is, the things we say and do this morning do not make this child spiritual, saved, or destined for heaven. ^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:8-9 read:** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.* These children (like all of us) stand before God guilty of sin and deserve to be sent to hell. No one is righteous, no not one. This service is not what saves any child. What saves people is God's grace. What saves people is deep trust and faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A child dedication service does not purify the child or make them holy. This service is more like a prayer, asking God to please one day bring our children into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. A child dedication is not salvific.

- 3) Third, and finally, a child dedication service is not related to baptism or circumcision. First a word on circumcision...the Jewish people to this day have their male children circumcised on the 8th day. The circumcision is not just the clipping of skin, but a ceremony that indicates trust that this physical action identifies themselves with the physical nation of Israel that have been given physical promises through their patriarch Abraham. Christians no longer believe circumcision is necessary as any marker of true religious faith. The Apostle Paul said this in Galatians: ^{NIV}

Galatians 5:1 *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

^{NIV} **Galatians 6:14** *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.*

Circumcision pointed forward to the Messiah Jesus who would be cut off for his people. It also was a physical mark on the male sex organ symbolizing that a child born of human seed would one day be the Savior and Lord. Now that Jesus has been born into the world and cut off through his death, this physical religious rite is not necessary or as Paul worded it “of no value”. But more than that, not only will circumcision be of no value, Christ will be of no value. Those who seek God’s favor or God’s righteousness through any physical act leave behind the righteousness that come by faith.

Christians leave behind the practices of the Old Covenant and move forward in a new relationship with God, called the New Covenant. Jesus brought in the New Covenant and the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant. Hebrews puts it this way: ^{NIV} **Hebrews 8:13** By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear. That may be more than you ever wanted to know about circumcision, but I share this with you so that no one thinks that there is any connection with a baby dedication than the Old Testament practice of circumcision.

But a baby dedication also has nothing to do with baptism. Baptism is the outward symbol of saving faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is the public act of being immersed in water to

symbolize that we have immersed our lives into Christ. Next Sunday on August 26 we have a few people planning to be baptized. They have personally believed in Jesus Christ. They have experienced God's forgiveness and an internal cleansing of soul. They now want to publicly make visible what has happened through the work of the Holy Spirit. Back in 1833 a group of New Hampshire Baptists gathered and agreed that this definition of baptism went to the heart of what baptism is all about, and I quote: "*We believe that Christian Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost; to show forth, in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its effect in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life.*" This child dedication service is not a baptism service. It is an act of hope that one day this child will believe in Jesus Christ and publicly testify to that faith through baptism.

So that's what a child dedication service is not. It's not biblically required, it doesn't save anyone from their sin, and it doesn't relate to baptism or circumcision.

So why do it? What is a child dedication service really about?

- 1) A baby dedication is ultimately about receiving God's precious gifts of children with a sense of joy and responsibility. ^{NIV} **Psalm 127:3** says *Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.* Today we receive these children as parents and God's people with joy and with a sobered sense of our responsibility to raise these kids to know and follow Jesus.
- 2) A baby dedication service is also about modeling Jesus' love for little ones. ^{NIV} **Mark 10:13** *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.* Today we will lay hands on these kids and ask Jesus to bless them because we believe that the LORD delights to give the Kingdom of God to children.
- 3) A baby dedication is also an initial step in obeying God's commands to raise children to know and follow Him. ^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:4** says *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* This is a high calling for both mom and dad. So too Deuteronomy ^{NIV} **Deuteronomy 6:4-8** reads *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God,*

the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

It should be noted that this command is not just for parents. This was a command given to the entire people of Israel, God's family. Thus, today, I'm going to ask not only the parents to dedicate their children to the LORD and commit to raise them to know Christ and follow Him. I'm also going to ask you, God's family, His church, to commit to be a part of these children's lives. We are all to bless them. We are all to receive them. We are all to use our spiritual gifts and labors of love to see that these children grow to know, love, and follow Jesus. No parent can do this job alone; that's why the church is so necessary.

These parents today, **(PARENTS' NAMES)**, recognize the sacredness of their responsibility and now bring back to the Lord the treasure which He has entrusted to them. In so doing, they publicly acknowledge their responsibility for the nurture and training of this child in the ways of righteousness and godliness.

Congregation (Ask to Stand): Do you promise to stand with this family and see to it that **(Parents' Names)** have the support of the larger Body of Christ in prayer, training, and encouragement as **(Child's Name)** matures? (If so, answer "we do.") (Be seated.)

Parents:

- **(Parent's Names)**, do you as parents of **(Child's Name)** recognize him/her as a gift of God entrusted to you by God?
- Do you give **him/her** to the Lord for whatever purpose God may have for **his/her** life?
- Will you seek by your example, prayers, love, discipline, and instruction in God's Word to rear **him/her** so that early in **his/her** life **s/he** might come to know Christ as **his/her** Savior and grow to be a useful servant in her generation?

Father Reads Verse of Scripture: _____

ACT OF DEDICATION. (Take child from parents.)

The inherent meaning of **(Child's Name)** is **(Meaning)**. But the Spiritual Connotation is **(Spiritual Connotation)**.

My Prayer for **(Child's Name)** is that **(He or She)** would ***(be <spiritual meaning> in his/her love of the Lord Jesus Christ and in his/her work for the Kingdom of God)***.

(Hand on Child's head.) In the name of the Lord Jesus, we present this child, **(Child's Full Name)**, to God, to His protection and to His saving and sanctifying grace.

Prayer