

Dedication of Infants

By Bill Scheidler

The dedication of infants is not a sacrament in the same way that communion and water baptism are. Both communion and water baptism are commanded by Christ, demonstrated in the Book of Acts and explained in the epistles.

Infant dedication is not a New Testament commandment. Parents are not more spiritual for formally dedicating their children and parents who do not dedicate their children are not walking in disobedience. Infant dedication falls more into the category of a local church tradition. It is a good tradition if it constantly affirms the sanctity of life, the importance of the family and the responsibility of all to see children as a serious blessing and responsibility.

Should infant dedication ever become more than that, it should suffer the same fate as the bronze serpent (II Kgs. 18:4).

I. What are some important definitions relative to this practice in the church?

A. The English definition of the word “dedicate” means:

1. To set apart for sacred uses; consecrate
2. To set apart for or devote to any special use, duty or purpose

B. The New Testament Greek word used for “dedicate” (*enkainizo*) means to renew, to initiate, to commence to use (John 10:22; Heb. 9:18; 10:20). The thought here is that we want to renew this child to use according to the purpose of God for his or her life.

C. There are two Hebrew words for “dedicate”.

1. The first one (*chanak*) is most often translated dedicate or train up (Deut. 20:5; Pro. 22:6; I Kgs. 8:63; II Chr. 7:5). It means:

a. To make narrow

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

The thought of dedicating a child includes the idea of narrowing the use of that child for the purposes of God.

b. To initiate the use of

See also: Num. 7:10; 7:11; 84, 88; II Chr. 7:9; Neh. 12:27; Ps. 30:1; Ezra 6:16, 17; Dan. 3:2, 3

2. The second one (*qadash*) is most often translated “consecrate, dedicate, hallow or sanctify (Ex. 13:2; I Sam. 7:1; Num. 3:13). It means:
 - a. To be pure, clean
 - b. To be holy, sacred, set apart
 - c. To consecrate to God

II. What the dedication of infants is not.

- A. It is not equivalent to Old Testament circumcision of the child for covenant privileges and relationship.
- B. It is not equivalent to infant baptism without the water.
- C. It is not christening (making the baby a Christian or a member of the Church).

III. What the dedication of infants is.

Infant dedication is:

- A. A returning of the child to the Lord (I Sam. 1:24-28).

“For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they worshiped the LORD there. I Samuel 1:27-28

- B. A public declaration of the intent of the parents to raise this child to serve the Lord.
- C. A placing of the child into the hands of the Lord to be used at His disposal (Luke 2:22).

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. Luke 2:22

The word used in the above passage for the word “present” means “to put at the disposal of another.” In dedication, parents are putting the child into the hands and at the disposal of the Lord (See: Romans 12:1).

- D. An impartation of divine blessing to the child through the laying on of hands (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 2:28).

Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. Mark 10:13-16

A blessing is an invocation of good. Just as Jesus laid hands on children and blessed them, in infant dedication church leaders lay hands on children and bless them. The blessing of the Lord makes rich and causes prosperity (Pro. 10:22).

IV. What is God's attitude toward children?

- A. Children are a heritage of the Lord (Ps. 127:3).

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward.

- B. Children are arrows in the hands of their parents (Ps. 127:4-5).

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

- C. Children are worthy of the Lord's time and attention (Mark 10:16; Mt. 19:14).

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:14

- D. Children are as olive plants (Ps. 128:3).

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table.

V. What is the part of the parents in the dedication of the child?

- A. They are acknowledging the divine origin of the child.
- B. They are acknowledging their responsibility to oversee the development of that child.
- C. They are "setting apart" that child to God's covenant and purposes (I Cor. 7:14).

- D. They are acknowledging their need for divine assistance in the rearing of that child.
 - 1. In giving wisdom (Judges 13:8)
 - 2. In giving protection (Mt. 18:10)
- E. They are making a public confession of their desire to keep the Lord as head of their homes (John 24:15c).

But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

VI. What elements could be part of the dedication of infants?

- A. Appropriate Scripture
- B. Charge to the Parents
- C. Testimony of Parents (if time permits)
- D. The Meaning of the Name(s)
- E. Prayer for Child and Parents
- F. Introduction to the People

VII. What are some of the things to guard against in the dedication of infants?

- A. Leaders should avoid using terminology that would make the act of dedication of infants a sacrament in the local church.
 - 1. Do not say, “Now this child is a part of the family.”
 - 2. Do not associate it with infant baptism and new birth language.
 - 3. Do not approach infant dedication as if it is a command from the Lord.

Parents who do not choose to dedicate their children in a public way are not to be seen as disobedient, lax or unspiritual.

- B. Leaders should prepare for the dedication time in advance to avoid embarrassing mistakes such as:

1. Referring to the child in the wrong gender.
2. Mispronouncing the first and/or last name of the child.

VIII. What are some additional benefits to the practice of infant dedication?

- A. Infant dedication becomes a great point of pastoral contact for members and their relatives.
- B. Infant dedication gives a regular opportunity for an exaltation of child bearing and biblical concepts of parenting.

Note: As a preparation for the parents prior to this event occurring it would be advisable to give them a copy of these notes for their own study.