

IN RESPONSE - INFANT BAPTISM AND EVANGELISM

by Dennis Prutow

One of the richest fields for evangelism exists within the pale of the visible church. This field consists of covenant children, those baptized in infancy. Unfortunately too many pastors, elders and church people are ignoring this field. They assume a popular position which legitimately gives our Baptist brothers and sisters grounds for criticism.

My article called "Baptism & The 'Unbreakable' New Covenant" drew the following anonymous response. "Most ministers in my former presbytery (PCA) agreed to infant baptism but adopted Baptist theology." What did this respondent mean? He explained. "Children of the covenant should be considered Christians at baptism." That is, we are to consider those baptized in infancy to be believers until they display otherwise. This is a very popular position in Reformed circles. I have heard it articulated many times in theology exams at presbytery meetings. Unfortunately, my respondent seems to think any other position is Baptist. This stance is the death of evangelism within the church. It maintains baptized infants are not the objects of evangelism. We should consider them Christians. We should consider them elect children of God.

There are several problems with this approach which undercut evangelism and which are contrary to Scripture. Many holding such a position are, perhaps unwittingly, espousing baptismal regeneration. They are saying, not audibly but by their actions, when the baptismal waters touch the infant, the child is regenerate and is at that moment to be considered a Christian. This is Roman Catholic and wholly unbiblical. Others baptize infants because of their leaning toward presumptive regeneration. They assume the infant is regenerate and baptize *on that ground*. Of course regenerate people, those who are born again, must be considered Christians. This position is also unbiblical.

We do not baptize the infants of believers to bring them into the mystical body of Christ; we do not hold to baptismal regeneration. Neither do we baptize the infants of believers because they already possess the Spirit; we do not hold to presumptive regeneration. We baptize the infants of believers because

they are, in contrast to the infants of the world, recipients of the *promise* of the Spirit. We beg God to fulfill this promise and grant the gift of the Spirit. We know the witness of Scripture. All those growing up within covenant families and receiving the sign and seal of the covenant are not elect children of God. Esau is the classic example. Although circumcised the eighth day, and raised in a covenant household, Esau was unregenerate and reprobate (Hebrews 12:16-17). This example is sufficient to warn us of the danger of assuming children of the covenant are Christians. Such an assumption wrongly leads us to consider unregenerate children of promise as those who are without need of the gospel. This is the death of evangelism.

An examination of the vows taken by parents when they present their children for baptism bears out my point. The first vow taken by parents in a conservative Presbyterian denomination reads,

Do you acknowledge that, although our children are conceived and born in sin and are therefore subject to condemnation, they are holy in Christ, and as members of his church ought to be baptized?

Note three things. First, children of believers are considered *holy in Christ*. Are they holy in that they are already recipients of the Holy Spirit? Or are they holy in that they are set apart from the world and in that special position where they have regular access to the teaching and preaching of the Word? The vow seems to suggest the former case.

Second, the infants of believers are considered members of Christ's church. In what sense? The form used with these vows seems to settle the matter. "So the children of the covenant are by baptism distinguished from the world and solemnly received into the visible church." However the vow taken by parents presents a different picture. According to vow, the *basis* for baptism is that covenant children are *already* members of Christ's church. This must mean they are already in union with Christ and part of His mystical body.¹ They are therefore

considered Christians. Baptism simply acknowledges this. Oddly enough, this is the Baptist model.

Third, there is no clear requirement placed upon parents to show children their sinful condition and present them the way of salvation. The second vow does ask, "Do you promise to instruct your child in the principles of our holy religion...?" But would parents then teach their baptized children they are Christians and fail to call them to Christ through repentance and faith?

The first vow taken by parents presenting their infant children for baptism in a Dutch Reformed denomination is almost identical to the one just reviewed. The same criticisms pertain to this vow.

Do you acknowledge that our children, although conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, yea, to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His church ought to be baptized?

Compare the following vow administered in my own denomination. Parents are asked with reference to their child,

Do you promise to teach him/her of his/her sinful nature, of the plan of salvation which centers in Jesus Christ, and his/her own need personal need of a relationship with Christ?

The child is baptized in view of the *promise* of the Spirit. The parents, with the church, beseech God to fulfill this promise. Baptism brings the child within the pale of the *visible* church and binds the church to the task of preaching the gospel and eliciting repentance and faith from the child. Neither the parents nor the church assume regeneration or union with Christ. Rather they swear before God to take the evangelistic field of covenant children very seriously. This is the biblical and Reformed position.

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¹ WSC Q&A 30 and John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, show union with Christ is part of the *application* of redemption.

IN RESPONSE - WORSHIP AS SERVICE TO GOD

by Dennis Prutow

The subject of worship is crucial in the church today. We face a consumer mentality within and without the church. Services of worship are designed in response to the desires and wishes of the market place. However, if worship is *service* to God, and if we designate specific times for *services* of worship, should we not *serve* God in worship according to His dictates? We certainly should seek to serve God in the broad sense, in all of life, according to His will. Is worship any different?

As we continue our study, we undertake a study of the words used in the New Testament for worship and service. We begin with Romans 12:1. The word in which we are interested is the Greek word *latreia*, a. It is translated *worship* or *service* in the versions cited. The translation of our word is given in italics.

NASV - I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *service of worship*.

KJV - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable *service*.

ASV - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *service*.

RSV - I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *worship*.

NIV - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of *worship*.

Our word is translated either worship or service except in the New American Standard where it is rendered service of worship. *Clearly worship is service*. The same root appears 25 times in the New Testament in verb or noun form. We see worship and service tied together in Matthew 4:10 [parallel, Luke 4:8], "Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord

your God, and serve Him only.'" To bow in obeisance before God or Satan, worship in the narrow sense, means placing yourself at his disposal for service in the broad sense. Luke 1:74 emphasizes service in the broad sense. Jesus Christ enters the world "[t]o grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear." In Luke 2:37 we find service, worship, in the narrow sense. The prophetess, Anna "never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers."

How is this worship performed? Is it performed in accord with the desires of God or the will of the worshipper? John 16:2 gives us a hint. "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God." Surely such *service* must involve perceived obedience to the will of God.

When we turn to the references in the book of Acts, we find the same thing. Acts 7:7 quotes Exodus 3:2, "And after that they will come out and serve Me in this place." God told Moses He would judge Egypt and Israel would come to Sinai to worship Him. At Sinai the formal worship of God in Israel was inaugurated. This worship was strictly regulated by God. As such it was service of God guided by Him.

Acts 7:42 speaks to the idolatry of Israel. "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven." This too is the narrow view of worship and service. It is regulated in the sense it functions in opposition to the dictates of God.

The three other references in Acts refer to the actions of the apostle Paul. In Acts 24:14 Paul says, "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the prophets." Paul's life was a life of service to God guided by the stipulations of the word of God. Here we find service to God in the broad sense. But this does not exclude worship in the narrow sense. Acts 26:6-7 indicates this is the case.

And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to

our fathers; *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day.

The service of the twelve tribes was worship in the temple which was closely regulated by God and service in the world also closely regulated by God.

When Paul speaks of service and worship would he disregard the element of divine regulation in worship any more than he would disregard it in broader service? Doubtful. All of life is *service* to the Almighty whether in the *service* of worship or in general *service* to God. Paul certainly had this in mind when he displayed his faith in the midst of a raging storm. "For this very night an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me" (Acts 27:23).

Paul served God because he knew he belonged to God. His service was therefore in accord with the desires of God. This is true whether we are talking about service or worship in the narrow sense or service to God in the broad sense. God outlines how he desires us to worship and serve Him. This is His prerogative.

If worship is service, a worship service should take the character required by God. It should not follow patterns deemed proper by fallen human beings. We need to renew our search for the will of God in worship. This was Calvin's position in his tract, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*.

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us, and maintains its truth, it will be found the following two not only have a principle place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, *first*, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, *secondly*, of the source of which salvation is to be obtained.

We need reformation in worship. We need to learn *to serve* God in worship.

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IN RESPONSE - WORSHIP AS SERVICE TO GOD, CONTINUED

by Dennis Prutow

We continue to look at worship. My objective is to show worship is service to God which follows God's desires rather than the human will. We take our lead from Romans 12:1, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." We are examining the word translated *service of worship*. This worship, as suggested by Paul, can be acceptable to God. The implication is worship and service may be unacceptable or displeasing to God.

Today, churches freely appropriate worldly methods in worship. Worship services are seeker friendly. This normally means the service meets the desires of people coming in from the world. "But do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Since worship is *service*, pleasing worship must follow the revealed will, the regulations, of God, not the will of the world. Our study now turns to Paul.

Romans 1:9 says, "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel of His Son*, is my witness...." Paul serves God in the gospel; His worship and service are regulated by the gospel.

In Romans 9:4 Paul refers to the "Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple service and the promises*." Here we have service in the narrow sense, temple worship to be exact. This was tightly regulated worship. Should we expect New Testament worship to be unregulated?

Paul speaks to the spiritual nature of our worship in Philippians 3:3, "For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." Our worship is motivated by the Holy Spirit. We therefore have a certain freedom in worship not experienced by the Old Testament saints. It is a freedom to glory in Christ. It is not a freedom to worship the living God *as we see fit*.

Romans 12:1 speaks of our "spiritual service of worship." For our worship to be acceptable to God, we must be born

again. Our hearts must be tuned to the Spirit and we must follow the Spirit. The word translated *spiritual* in the New American Standard Version is translated *reasonable* in the King James. The phrase reads, "which is your reasonable service." The Greek word is *th.n logikh.n*, logical. Reasonable or logical service is service which follows the dictates of the Master. It is unreasonable to disregard the specific desires of the Master and worship Him according to the dictates of our own hearts. Following the Spirit involves following the word of the Spirit given in Scripture. This is an objective standard not subjective feelings.

Paul points us in a similar direction in 2 Timothy 1:3. "I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience." Paul's service was in the gospel (Romans 1:9). This was service and worship approaching God through Christ. The only way to God, the only way to a clear conscience, is through the blood of Christ. To maintain a clear conscience before God requires service and worship in accordance with the revealed will of God. Again, we are not left to our own subjective desires.

We now turn to the references to service and worship in Hebrews. Hebrews 8:4 speaks of the priests in ancient Israel who serve the earthly tabernacle, "who serve a copy and shadow of heavenly things." This was service in the narrow sense, worship closely regulated by God. As Hebrews 9:1 tells us, "Now the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary." Worship or service does indeed involve divine regulation. Hebrews 9:6 speaks of this same "divine worship." Hebrews 9:9 tells us Old Testament tabernacle worship "is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience." Our word is translated *worshipper*. The prime distinction between worship in the Old Testament and in the New is not that one had regulations and the other does not. The prime distinction is that Old Testament worship, in and of itself, did not make the worshipper pure in conscience. The blood of bulls and goats could not do that. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14).

Speaking to the repetitive nature of Old Testament sacrifices Hebrews 10:2 asks, "Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had a consciousness of sins?" Our word is again translated *worshipper*. The blessing of New Testament worship is not that it lacks regulations but that it centers on Christ.

Hebrews 12:28 now uses the same word, laden as it is with the concept of regulation, to describe New Testament service. "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe." Notice the similarity between Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 12:28. Our Worship is the result of God's grace. It is *service*. It can therefore be either acceptable or unacceptable. It should be offered with reverence and awe.

Finally there is Hebrews 13:10, "We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." The regulations of worship followed by them pointed them to Christ. They needed to turn to Him. These regulations were not bad. Closely regulated worship is not bad. It is worship designed by God to be pleasing to Him.

The final texts are in Revelation. Revelation 7:15 pictures blood washed saints. "For this reason they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple." Here are saints who perfectly follow the precepts of God and perfectly worship in spirit and truth. Heaven will not be without regulations. Those present will freely and joyfully follow them, especially in worship. Before God's throne "His bondservants shall serve Him" (Revelation 22:3). The Bible ends with this note. Bondservants are those bound to the regulated service of their master. The worship of the saints in heaven will be the regulated worship of joyous servants.

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