



PARENT-CHILD DEDICATION

CALVARY
CHURCH

Child Dedication—Parent Consecration Calvary Church

“For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord.” 1 Samuel 1:27–28 (NASB)

This verse, quoting Samuel’s mother Hannah, summarizes the sentiment of many parents when they request to have their children dedicated to the Lord before the church body. What is really behind the often practiced ritual of child dedication? What is its meaning and purpose? And what is to be expected of parents who desire to dedicate their children to the Lord?

Child Dedication is not Infant Baptism

In general, there are probably three motivating factors behind child dedication. First, for many it is left over from infant baptism, a substitute for a tradition picked up from churches that baptize children.

Secondly, it is motivated by a genuine desire to begin a child’s life the best way possible, with the desire that it will influence the rest of his life. Thirdly, there is a desire to involve the church, the extended spiritual family of the child of God, in the spiritual life of the newborn and its family.

Calvary Church does not believe the Bible teaches or encourages the practice of infant baptism and therefore we do not believe that child dedication should be practiced if it is equated with infant baptism.

The first clear reference to child baptism comes in the third century, about 200 years after Christ, and then it is spoken of negatively by Tertullian (A.D. 200-206). Child baptism came to be a generally accepted practice only after the Gospel was perverted from “Jesus saves,” to “the church saves.” Under that system, a person had to be a member of the “the Church” to be assured of eternal life, and the way to become a member of “the Church” was to be baptized (or christened). It was then taught that God mediated grace through the church, and baptism was one of the means of grace—along with other sacraments—which helped a person attain to eternal life. It was feared that if a child died unbaptized, the child would be forever lost.

With the coming of the Reformation in the 1500's, the Gospel was restored to its New Testament purity, teaching that salvation is the result of personal faith in Christ alone, and is not the result of church membership or of any external ritual. It is not the church that saves, but God, and He saves through faith alone not through church membership, baptism, or any other good works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Even though the Reformers restored a biblical understanding of the Gospel, some continued the practice of infant baptism even though they recognized it did not provide a means of salvation. They were still deeply influenced by generations of tradition. So it was taught that baptism is to the New Covenant what circumcision was to the Old Covenant: Baptism introduces a child to the benefits of the New Covenant, securing for the child a place in the church and a promise of eventual faith.

We believe the Bible teaches that baptism is a response of those who have personally placed their faith in Christ alone as their means of entering into an eternal relationship with God. Baptism serves as a means to declare publically trust in Jesus Christ as the only means of personal salvation. (If you have questions about this please read our booklet, *We Believe in Baptism*.) And we believe that the benefits of the New Covenant are received through this personal faith alone (Romans 10:9-10). Therefore, we do not believe or practice child baptism and do not equate child dedication with baptism.

If baptism were to be equated with circumcision, it would be more reasonable to point out that circumcision marked identity with a physical nation, the Jews, and baptism marks identity with Christ and with a spiritual body, the church. One had to be born physically before being circumcised, and one must be born spiritually before being baptized. Baptism may have some analogy to circumcision, but it is not equal to nor replaces it. An individual must choose to be baptized when he or she personally trusts in Christ and understands the meaning of baptism. Baptism cannot provide eternal life either for an adult or an infant.

Child Dedication is a Commitment

If child dedication is not equivalent to baptism, what is it? It is our belief that it is dedication, no more and no less. It is a commitment that involves the whole church body, because the church is the extended spiritual family of each Christian (Mark

3:34-35). But it is primarily a commitment of the parents to be what they should be in order to give their child the best spiritual opportunities they can provide in a loving home.

Many parents feel guilty when their children do not turn out “right”. They fear that it is evidence that they did not rear the child correctly, and sometimes it is. But parents must also realize that they cannot be responsible for how a child **responds** to the truth. They can only be responsible for how they themselves **presented** and **represented** the truth to the child. Parents are responsible to teach and live the Christian life based on Scripture, and then to trust God to use that to draw their children to the Lord. Therefore, the dedication of a child really has to be preceded by the dedication of the parents, a consecration to **be** godly, a commitment to follow Christ in what they are and what they do.

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Child Dedication is Parent Dedication

Christian parenting is a full-time job, seven days a week. In one study of teenagers who had been raised in church-related homes but had rejected Christianity, a major factor in the resistance to Christ was their perception of hypocrisy and inconsistency in the lives of their parents. A “Sunday” religion will not influence children for Christ. This does not mean that parents can be perfect, but they can humbly admit their imperfections and at the same time evidence a heart-felt desire to be like the Savior.

Such spiritual commitment by the parents is bound to affect **what** they do, and **how** they do it. It will affect the way parents relate to each other, how the family communicates, the goals they strive for, and the way they spend their leisure time.

Here are four examples of how dedication to the Lord Jesus will have an impact on the parents:

1. Dedication to Christ by the parents will affect their **relationship with each other**. Scripture commands that a wife live in submission to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24, 1 Peter 3:1-6), acknowledging that God has appointed him to be head of the family.

At the same time, Scripture commands the husband to give up himself out of love to his wife, putting her needs and wants ahead of his own (Ephesians 5:25-30, 1 Peter 3:7). These respective responses are not **natural** to either the husband or wife; we are all naturally selfish, demanding our own way. But they are supernatural responses, evidence of commitment to Christ. When parents commit their children to the Lord, they are committing themselves to each other in the way God commands.

2. Dedication to Christ will require parents to be counter-cultural. Our busy materialistic culture continually bombards us with the message that success and satisfaction is obtained through possessions and position. That self-worth is obtained through comparison. Parents who want to raise healthy godly children need to continually evaluate their priorities, their time commitments, and their focus on possessions. Children need their parents more than they need possessions. They need their time with the parents more than they need a full calendar.

Therefore we encourage both fathers and mothers to use the process of dedication as a significant opportunity to reevaluate their priorities as they consecrate themselves to God for the purpose of raising their children. There is no simple formula for every decision, but committed parents may need to make difficult economic and career decisions for the sake of their children.

3. Dedication to be Christian parents will be evident in what the family does together. The Lord Jesus will be the obvious center of the home. This will be seen in regular family devotions, a time—preferably daily—when the family gathers to join in the reading of Scripture and prayer. It is the responsibility of the parents to train the children in the practical aspects of godly living (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), using the natural opportunities presented at home each day. With the hectic pace of life today, it will take discipline to set aside a few minutes, such as after the evening meal or at bedtime, to discuss spiritual things. (Feel free to ask our Children’s Ministry Team for suggested resources.)

Christian family life will also be seen in consistent involvement in church life—both attendance and service. The Bible commands us not to forsake our assembling (Hebrews 10:24-25). Our involvement in church should be complemented by a lifestyle that witnesses to our neighbors, colleagues, and

friends that Jesus is our Lord. What we do speaks more loudly than what we say. What we do reflects what we really are.

Christian family life also will demand careful evaluation of how we use our leisure. The Psalmist said, "I will put no worthless thing before my eyes" (Psalm 101:3). The most ungodly forms of morals and behavior are being packaged as entertainment and then introduced wholesale into our homes via television programs, books, magazines, movies and the internet. Values are absorbed in these entertaining circumstances far more quickly than they can be taught in formal settings like church. Children spend at least 30 times as much time watching TV, internet and listening to the radio as they spend in Sunday School. Therefore the family must guard what comes into the home. Children are **always** learning, for better or worse.

4. Finally, dedication to Christian parenting means to hold before the child God's plan for his life and for the world. God calls some Christians into vocational Christian service, but He calls all Christians to be part of His program to extend the gospel to the world for God's glory. The issue is not how you make your living; the issue is **why** you are living. Many parents see no better future for their children than that they get a secure job so they can have a comfortable future. But that is not a Christian perspective on life. We are here to do the will of God, and we need to hold that before our children as their highest challenge as well.

For Hannah, dedicating Samuel to the Lord meant leaving him at the temple to be a servant to Eli and to God. She couldn't have given up her beloved son unless she had first given up her own life to the Lord. Each parent who brings a child to the Lord before the whole church is facing the same issues Hannah faced: Am I willing to be what God wants me to be? Am I willing to give up my children (and maybe grandchildren) for them to be all that God wants them to be? That is the summation of what child dedication entails.

Process for Child Dedication at Calvary Church

Because we desire as a church to be a family, we provide a means for parents to publically declare their commitment as well a means of providing assistance to them in raising their children.

In order to publically dedicate your children at Calvary parents are asked to:

1. Apply for a Child Dedication, Parent Consecration class at www.calvarychurch.org/next-steps/child-dedication.
2. Attend the class.
3. Select a time to participate in a dedication that works for your family. A link to the Dedication Sunday signup will be provided at the end of the Child Dedication, Parent Consecration class.
4. Submit a prayer and photo to the Children's Ministry Team in preparation for that morning.
5. If you have questions please contact the Children's Ministry Team at 717-560-2341 or children@calvarychurch.org.



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