

# Dearest Ashley, Child of the Covenant

*Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. | June 1990*

Dear Ashley,

I am unable to sleep tonight as I think about your big day tomorrow, so I decided to write you a letter. It will be a number of years before you will be able to read and understand this. When you do, I hope it will be an encouragement to you. Although it was only six weeks ago we brought you home from the hospital, what will be done to you tomorrow will be one of the most significant events in your life.

Not only were your mother and I not raised in Christian homes, but also as young Christians we did not have any appreciation for infant baptism. Your mother was baptized when she became a Christian in high school. Although I was baptized as an infant, my parents at the time did not have the slightest notion of what that involved. For them it was a cultural thing. When I became a Christian through the ministry of Reformed University Fellowship, I thought I should be baptized. The campus minister, however, showed me that the significance of my baptism did not depend on my parents or the minister. As long as it was Christian baptism it was valid. Nevertheless, even though I was not re-baptized, I did not appreciate the wonder or uniqueness of infant baptism.

The rich significance of infant baptism began to dawn on us only as we prepared for your birth. When Pastor Perkins baptizes you tomorrow morning, God is declaring that you are a part of the covenant people – a member of the church. Your baptism signifies that you stand in a special relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, who by His own baptism identified with His elect people. All those who are baptized are set apart as belonging to Him. Ashley, every person stands before God in a covenant relationship. Either he is under the old covenant made with Adam and thus obligated to obey God perfectly or suffer eternal punishment, or he is under the covenant of grace through the Lord Jesus Christ who perfectly kept the first covenant, and by His death paid the penalty for our failure to keep it.

The Bible teaches that one enters into covenant with Christ in one of two ways: by profession of faith like Abraham, the Philippian jailer, and Mom; or by birth like Ishmael, Isaac, the children of the Philippian jailer, and me. Either way, baptism is God's appointed symbol of membership. It

reminds us that by nature we are dead in our sins and trespasses and must be regenerated by the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. In baptism, we are ceremonially cleansed, because we are in covenantal union with Christ. In your baptism, Ashley, God lays claim on you and obligates you to keep His covenant. You keep His covenant as you believe in Christ as Savior and seek to please Him by keeping His commandments.

Does your baptism guarantee that you will be renewed by the Holy Spirit? No, it doesn't. Of course, Mom and I pray that you are already regenerated and will grow up never knowing a day that you were not trusting in Christ alone for your salvation. But only God can grant you a new heart. Sweetheart, if you have been renewed, it will show itself in your faith, love, and obedience. If not, your baptism will be a constant reminder of God's mercy in providing a Savior and your need to repent and believe. If you were to continue in unbelief, your baptism would be a witness against you that you were a covenant breaker and your condemnation would be all the more severe.

At this point you may wonder, "What use is baptism?" Paul anticipates this question in Romans 9:4-5 as he depicts the benefits of covenant membership of the old covenant people. Actually, he begins to answer the question in Romans 3:1-4, "What is the benefit of being a Jew?" Paul says that one important privilege is the possession of God's Word. However, he temporarily abandons the discussion of Israel's benefits until he has dealt in detail with the true method of salvation. In Chapter 9 he returns to discuss the covenant benefits that belonged to Israel. After having expressed his great burden for their conversion, Paul lists their privileges. First, they were members of the covenant community, "kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites – whose are the fathers." Further, they were the sons of God "to whom belong the adoption." As such they enjoyed the physical manifestations of God's presence, "the glory." Moreover, God had bound Himself to them in contractual agreements by "the covenants." They had the special revelation of God's Word, His worship, and the promise of pardon with the gift of the Holy Spirit, "the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises." And best of all the Savior would descend from them and come for them, "from whom is the Christ according to the flesh."

Ashley, as a child of the covenant these benefits are yours. You belong to the true Israel which is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are declared to be a daughter of God and so we teach you to sing "Jesus loves

me.” You live in a supernatural environment. Christ by His Spirit is in our home where we live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. You will see what it means to live by faith, and you will learn how God provides for us as we pray with and for you and teach you to pray. We will remind you regularly that God has obligated Himself to be your God, thus you are to believe in Christ and obey. We will teach you the Scriptures. You will worship at home and with the church on the Lord’s Day. You will learn God’s promises and will be taught to heed their conditions. Therefore, we will discipline you so that sin might be uprooted from your heart and you will learn to obey.

For these reasons, tomorrow morning we will take vows and make promises to God when you are baptized. By our vows we will claim the promise of the covenant on your behalf and Mom and I will acknowledge our responsibility to raise you according to the covenant.

All of this is wrapped up in baptism. As God pictures your union with Christ through cleansing, He assures us that He has made His covenant with you as well as with us and that He will work through His covenant in administering His salvation.

It is now quite late. I must try to sleep. I love you my precious little one. But what is even more wonderful, God loves you.

Love,  
Papa