

THE BIBLE  
&  
THE UNBORN  
*a biblical study for grieving parents*

Dr. Glenn Parkinson



## THE BIBLE AND THE UNBORN

*a biblical study for grieving parents*

In this day and age, a subject entitled *The Bible and the Unborn* sounds like a political tract dealing with the pro-life/pro-choice controversy. While that tragic issue deserves the large volume of discussion it receives, this study is offered for a group of people who are usually excluded from consideration. I refer to parents who have suffered miscarriages or stillbirths. Pro-life Christians usually approach sanctity of life issues as matters of justice. But what about the deaths which are not planned? We are all but silent when it comes to grieving the unintended and agonizing loss of life experienced by so many Christian couples. As Pastor and seminary professor Dan Doriani puts it, "If abortion is murder, miscarriage is a death in the family."

Those who sadly lose their birthed children honor their sons and daughters in funeral or memorial services, even if they were but a single day from the womb. They treat the tiny bodies with respect and lay them to rest with dignity. But the parents of children who die before they are born usually have no such consolation. There is often no body available for them to honor. Such children are rarely named; often their gender is unknown. Family, friends and even the church do not seem to know how to cope with the loss. They typically point crushed couples forward to the possibility of other children or adoption, and discourage them from dwelling on the past. Many family and friends will not even acknowledge that anyone has died, accepting the modern myth that an unborn child is merely the tissue of his/her mother, and not yet a real human being.

And yet, it is important to grieve. It is important for our own integrity, that we live out our professed belief that life begins at conception. It is important for the child's sake, to honor his/her dignity and worth. It is important for God's sake, whose beautiful design for humanity has been so horribly compromised in this fallen world.

But along with grief, do Christian parents also have cause to hope? How are we to think biblically about the future destiny of those who die unborn? The question is difficult, not only because of the powerful emotions involved, but also because the Bible never addresses the subject directly. Ultimately, we must understand that we can know God' mind on this subject only to the extent that He has revealed it to us.

There is a biblical example, however, which encourages us to further study. King David lost a son within a week of his birth. His particular situation was unique, but his attitude about his son's future is relevant to our questions. When David finally put aside his mourning, he said,

*“Now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”*  
*(2 Samuel 12:23)*

David looked forward to the resurrection of the dead (Psalm 16:9-10; cf. Acts 2:25-32) and eternal life (Psalm 23:6). What David probably meant is that further grief could not bring the boy back to this world; instead, David could look forward in faith to seeing his boy again in Paradise. Here is a biblical author confident about the salvation of a newborn he has just lost.

How could David have such confidence? Tracing an answer to that question may give insight into the future of unborn covenant children. First, let's recall basic Bible teaching about salvation and consider the Bible's silence regarding the salvation of the unborn. Then, we will look at passages which give the Christian parent ground for hope, and finally outline a biblical response.

## WE ALL NEED SAVING

A great many Protestant Christians are not concerned about the salvation of the unborn. They reason that since the unborn are unable to choose to sin, they must be innocent and immune to divine judgment. The Roman Catholic Church reasons that a lack of positive righteousness makes the unborn unqualified for heaven, and

thus imagines a third option, a limbo state in between blessedness and condemnation. The secular world does not think of divine judgment at all, but prefers to imagine that we are born a pure, blank slate.

The Bible teaches something very different, however, when it comes to human sin and guilt. In the Bible, sin is not only an act, but also a predisposition of the heart. In addition, guilt is not only something we earn for ourselves, but also something we inherit from our first parents.

Sin involves a predisposition of the heart. The reality of life is that no one has to teach a child to respond in fear, selfishness and moral weakness. On the contrary, positive virtues must be painstakingly and lovingly taught. Jesus taught that evil does not enter our soul from without; it comes out of us from within (Mark 7:14-23; cf. James 1:13-15). We are born into this world morally broken; we are predisposed to sin and that predisposition is made manifest as we grow older.

Before God, guilt is inherited as well as earned. The idea of inherited guilt is even more difficult for modern Christians, since we are used to the idea that every person stands or falls on his/her own merits. The Lord does respond to the decisions of each individual, of course, but the Bible teaches that God ultimately deals with every person through a representative of His choosing. That is to say, we inherit our guilt or our righteousness from another.

As to inherited righteousness, Christians understand this well when it comes to salvation. Being saved means that God has chosen to deal with us through Christ. That is to say, Christ stands before God representing every saved individual. Our own good works are known by God and rewarded appropriately, but our own works are irrelevant when it comes to our salvation. Salvation comes from sinners being spiritually united with Christ (“in Christ”), so that we are credited with the same relationship to God that Jesus has. Christ’s righteousness is credited as being our righteousness, regardless of how we have actually thought and lived (Romans 3:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Our sins are forgiven, having already been justly punished in Christ on His cross (1 Peter 2:24). The reputations we earned are

exchanged with Jesus for the reputation He earned. Our salvation is complete and secure, because it depends only upon the work of our Savior, and not upon our work at all. The same spiritual union with Christ which brings forgiveness and righteousness creates at the same time a genuine new heart – a regeneration of the core of our soul that predisposes us to turn from sin and live out the righteousness already attributed to us. Everyone who is truly redeemed has such a new heart.

This helps us to understand our inherited guilt. Salvation works the way it does because it has to parallel the way sin has ruined us. Jesus can fully represent His people because God set up this sort of arrangement before – with our first ancestor, Adam. When Adam was the only human being in existence, he represented all the people who would spring forth from him (including Eve). God attributed to all the people who were physically bound to Adam (“in Adam”) the same relationship Adam had with Him. That is, when Adam sinned, the guilt of his sin was attributed to everyone he represented, quite apart from anything they might or might not do. At the same time, the predisposition to distrust and disobey God that Adam cultivated in himself has also been passed down to every one of his children – a predisposition to sin which becomes obvious as soon as we are able to act upon it.

It is impossible for a sinner to find salvation on his own. In His mercy, God provided a marvelously creative way to save us – by providing a “second Adam” in Jesus Christ, and using our faith to sever our old tie with Adam and establish a new one in Christ. Therefore, just as everyone in Adam inherited his guilt and develops his sinful nature, everyone in Christ inherits His righteousness and develops His holy nature.

*Adam ... was a pattern of the one to come ... For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will*

*those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

*(Romans 5:14-21)*

*So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.* *(1 Corinthians 15:45-49)*

This means that, even though we do not choose to sin until we are old enough to do so, we still begin our lives inheriting both Adam's guilt and his sinful nature. As King David said, *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.* (Psalm 51:5, a statement which did not reflect some impropriety of his mother, but rather his own part in the human sin we all share). As David said, sin and guilt are things we inherit at conception.

The point of all this is that our concern for the salvation of the unborn is appropriate because the smallest infant, and even the unborn child, is in desperate need of salvation. It is true that a person unable to choose sin will not be judged as severely as a practiced sinner will be. But when God looks upon the predisposition of our souls, He will see that from birth, our hearts are all estranged from Him. We all *fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace*

*through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24)*  
 Only God's free grace justifying sinners through Christ can save us, whether we are sixty years old, or six weeks old in the womb. That is why, when parents in our church prepare for their infant's baptism, they acknowledge *their child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit.*

## IS THERE HOPE OF GRACE APART FROM FAITH?

Salvation is all of grace, which the Scriptures tell us is administered through faith.

*If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Romans 10:9-11)*

*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

The Bible never mentions God's saving grace in any other context than that of personal faith in Christ.

For centuries, however, people have asked, "What about people who are not physically capable of faith?" What about the mentally handicapped, or the very young, or the unborn? Has God provided a way to save any of them? The simple fact is that the Bible does not say. Clearly, God is under no obligation to save any sinner.

Here is where a biblical understanding of salvation gives us hope. If salvation came only through a work of faith on our part, then none of the unborn could be saved. But if salvation is a matter of sovereign grace apart from our works, the situation is quite different. Since Adam's guilt is credited to the unborn before they consciously respond to God, it seems reasonable to assume that

Christ's righteousness might be credited in the same way. Faith is the inevitable result of saving grace in the fullness of time, but if, in God's providence, a lifespan is too short to bear such fruit, would such a one be any the less chosen by God for salvation?

In fact, the Scripture clearly teaches that God especially delights to show mercy on the least likely.

*He chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.* (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

What could be more weak and lowly than the unborn?

And yet, if the Lord God did choose in sovereign mercy to save even some of our unborn children, why is the Bible so silent on the subject? This question must have plagued every generation of parents back to the very beginning, yet no prophet or apostle ever addressed the issue.

In general, we cannot argue a point from silence. However, perhaps God's silence on the issue speaks more loudly than we might first suppose. Assume for the sake of argument that it is God's good pleasure to justify some unborn children, by applying the work of Christ to them apart from the faith they cannot exercise. Assuming that to be true, it immediately becomes clear that God could not tell us that fact. Already, people destroy millions and millions of unborn children for their own convenience, covering their guilt with slogans about rights, and mutterings of "population control". God knows the human heart. Can you imagine what would happen if God told us that it is possible that unborn children might be saved, apart from faith? Humanity would take it as a blanket justification for abortion and infanticide. The result would be too terrible to imagine.

We can at least say that the salvation of the unborn is not specifically ruled out by Scripture, and it seems to be consistent with its overarching theme of sovereign grace. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith states:

*Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.*

(WCF 10.3)

## BELIEVERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

So it appears to be consistent with Scripture that some who are incapable of faith might be saved by grace apart from faith. But does God actually save any such people in this way? In particular, do Christian parents have any biblical reason to hope to see their unborn children one day in glory?

While the Bible does not answer this question directly, one theme it does deal with in some detail is God's special interest in the children of believers. God's covenant, His plan of salvation fulfilled in the gospel of Christ, was designed to influence our children.

*Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.*

(Psalm 22:30-31)

*We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done ... so the next generation would know them, even thchildren yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.*

(Psalm 78:4,6)

*From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.*

(Psalm 103:15-18)

This principle was emphasized to Abraham ...

*"I have chosen Abraham, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way*

*of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”* (Genesis 18:19)

... and reemphasized to Moses in the Second Commandment.

There, while threatening vengeance to idolaters over several generations, God said He would show love *to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.* (Exodus 20:6)

The Apostle Paul made it clear that while no one is saved simply because of their parent's faith, children of believers are set apart by God in a special way (1 Corinthians 7:14), and are especially blessed because they have access through their parents to the means of grace (Romans 3:1-2).

God's plan to bless His people seems to envision that His blessing will normally include their children.

*“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD. “My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever;”* says the LORD. (Isaiah 59:21)

Furthermore, the Scripture makes it clear that the Lord speaks of His people *as* His people, even before they are born.

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.* (Psalm 139:13,16, of King David)

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”* (Jeremiah 1:5, of Jeremiah the prophet)

*But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me ...* (Galatians 1:15-16, of the Apostle Paul)

Jesus' mother once visited Elizabeth, who was carrying John the Baptist. The Scripture implies that even in the womb, John reacted to the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41).

Jesus' attitude is well known concerning believers' children too small to exercise their own faith.

*People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 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. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*  
(Mark 10:13-16)

When Peter and Paul preached the gospel, they specifically included a reference to believer's children:

*"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."*  
(Acts 2:38-39)

*"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."* (Acts 16:31)

Following this train of thought in Scripture, we have found that unborn children need to be saved, and that it is consistent with God's sovereign grace to choose the weakest and most lowly among us. We have also seen that the Scriptures consistently place the children of believers in a special category. This does not mean that all children of believers are saved (we know from biblical example that they are not), but it may imply a merciful attitude when it comes to covenant children who cannot yet exercise faith.

All of this may help us understand King David's confidence concerning his infant child.

## LIVING IN HOPE

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.*

*(Deuteronomy 29:29)*

Anything taught in the Word of God is true. What is clear in the Scripture defines sound doctrine which binds the conscience and feeds the soul of any believer. However, when God has not chosen to be clear on a subject, then we must establish our personal convictions from reasonable conclusions from what we do find in the Bible. Personal convictions are not infallible; they do not bind the consciences of others, and they may not be taught as God's will in the church. Personal convictions built on the Scriptures do, however, reflect our best understanding of difficult issues and form the basis for many of our personal decisions and private hope.

Christians differ concerning the matter of salvation for those who are not capable of exercising faith, such as the unborn. Some discount any hope of salvation. On the other hand, my most respected seminary professor told my class years ago that it was his personal conviction that *all* unborn children are saved. But he was quick to point out that he did not teach such a thing. He could not, because the Scriptures do not; it was merely his own conviction, based upon his understanding of God's Word.

No one who has lost a child before even having the chance to meet him can approach this question without deep emotions. The anguish of not even having a body to say goodbye to, the press from loving family and friends to move on, the general intolerance of our culture to even acknowledge that you have reason to grieve ... these things confuse the heartache of bruised parents, but they cannot fully extinguish the hope, or the desire to hope, we have for our offspring.

There is good reason to believe that this hope has a biblical foundation. If you are a believer who has experienced the heart

breaking loss of miscarriage or stillbirth, search the Scriptures to understand its teaching about your unborn child. Since the Bible is not explicit on this issue, do not teach your convictions to others as gospel truth. But if, as I have, you come to the conclusion that the Scriptures do give hope for your child's eternal future, then live in that hope. Do not be intimidated by a society which cannot face the dignity of the unborn for political reasons. Some recommendations:

- Name your child. How difficult it is to treat someone as a person when referring to an "it". If you don't know the gender, then just pick one. This might make for some amusement some day when you meet your "Judy" in Paradise and find him a strapping male, but that's OK. The Lord will have new names for us, anyway (Revelation 2:17).
- Consider a religious memorial service to honor your child and his Maker. This could be as simple as an informal home service with family and friends sponsored by your church; see what your church is comfortable with.
- Make the child part of your family history. Include her in the number of children you have been blessed with, though she died very young. Talk about her with her siblings, and help them look forward to meeting her one day. This will teach our surviving children more about the sanctity of life than a dozen political rallies.
- When tragedy strikes a Christian couple you know, allow them to grieve. After all, there has been a death in the family. Then, as you have opportunity, share with them the basis for your own hope.

I, for one, look forward to some joyous surprises in Paradise.

*"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."* (Acts 2:38-39)





SEVERNA PARK  
*evangelical presbyterian*<sup>(PCA)</sup>

110 Ritchie Highway ~ Pasadena, MD 21146  
410-544-5013 ~ [www.spepchurch.org](http://www.spepchurch.org)