

Household Baptism and the Baptism of Infants

Acts 16:13-15
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The Lord Jesus Christ is Head of His Church and is the very one who instituted the sacrament of baptism as He declared in Matthew 28:19: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

What is the meaning of baptism? Baptism literally means washing (Mark 7:3-4; Hebrews 9:10). So baptism is a washing or cleansing, but a washing from what? Baptism is a washing or cleansing from sin (“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 1:9). For just as water is an agent for cleansing our hands and our bodies from dirt (etc.), so the water of baptism is that which God has appointed to signify and seal to us that we all NEED to be cleansed from sin, and the water of baptism also signifies and seals the PROMISE of Christ that He alone can cleanse from sin all those who will receive by faith alone Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:24). So for all of us who have been baptized with water, let us understand that baptism points us to our NEED for and the PROMISE of cleansing from sin that only Jesus Christ can give.

But there are those who may be within the sound of my voice who may ask, “Why do I need to be cleansed from sin? What have I done that is so bad? I haven’t murdered anyone; I haven’t committed adultery; I haven’t built images of false gods and bowed down to them.” But dear ones, the truth of the matter is that we are all guilty of murder many times over, for Jesus (the Son of God) said that whoever is sinfully angry with another, or whoever angrily calls another a fool has committed murder in

his heart and is worthy of hell (Matthew 5:22). The truth of the matter is that we are all guilty of adultery more times than we could possibly count, for Jesus (the Creator of all things) said that whoever lusts in his heart after a woman (or whoever lusts in her heart after a man) has already committed adultery in his (or her) heart (Matthew 5:28). And the truth of the matter is that we are all guilty of idolatry (in bowing down to a false god) so many times to our shame and disgrace, for God has said through His apostle in Holy Scripture that coveting what is not ours and desiring what belongs to others is idolatry (Colossians 3:5); for whatever we love and desire more than God, we covet. God's evaluation of all people (whether man, woman, or child), that is, all people except Jesus Christ who was without any sin, is that "there is none righteous, no, not one . . . there is none that seeketh after God . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one" Romans 3:10,11,12). Dear ones, we have all violated God's righteous and holy commandments, and therefore, we all deserve, not the salvation of God, not eternal life in heaven, but to the contrary, we all deserve everlasting condemnation in hell.

Now if anyone may be thinking, "This is really a very gloomy sermon and evaluation of all mankind", let me challenge such a thought by asking, "How can one be healed of cancer, if the deadly disease in all of its gloominess and ugliness is not first discovered and understood? Why would one flee for help to be healed of cancer, if one does not know that he/she has it and how life-threatening cancer can be?" So it is with sin, there can be no healing from sin and the eternal condemnation that sin brings, if there is no admission and confession that one is a sinner and stands in desperate need of forgiveness of sin and deliverance from hell through the only One who can heal us—Jesus Christ. Dear ones, if we think we are good people and can earn our way into heaven by means of our own good works or by means of anything good within us, then Jesus Christ died in vain. But God is clear that Jesus Christ died to save sinners,

not those who think they are good and righteous people in themselves (or have something to offer him, whether their faith, repentance, or love): “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

And it is not only adults that find themselves in this desperately needy condition, but it is all children (even infants) who likewise stand in need of a Savior. For all children (and even infants) are accounted sinners from the womb (Psalm 51:5; Psalm 58:3). Why? Because the original sin of Adam and the corruption of sin has passed from Adam to all his posterity by ordinary generation (Romans 5:12), and this is evidenced for all to see by the fact that death comes to infants while yet in the womb, and to infants who are born and yet live a day, a week, a month or a year. Clearly, death has infected children and even infants alike. Why? According to God speaking in His Word, the fact that death has infected even infants means that sin has also infected infants (from the moment of conception), for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). And since sin has infected infants and children, then infants and children are in need of a Savior from the guilt of sin and from the curse of everlasting death in hell—and the only Savior God has provided for sin is Jesus Christ (“And now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” Hebrews 9:26). And because not only adults and teenagers need a Savior to cleanse them from sin, but infants as well need a Savior to cleanse them from sin, the Lord has authorized that not only parents in a household who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as their only hope of eternal salvation, but the whole household (infants and small children as well) should be baptized, in order to point all within that household to their need of Jesus Christ and to the promise of salvation; so that as those infants and small children grow within a Christian home, they may continually be reminded by their baptism that they need to come to Jesus Christ and receive by faith alone the

promised cleansing and forgiveness from sin, the promised righteousness of Christ, and the promised everlasting life that only Jesus Christ can give.

My text for the sermon this Lord's Day is taken from Acts 16:13-15. We will focus our attention on the following main points: (1) God First Opens the Hearts of Those who Trust in Christ Alone for Their Eternal Salvation, as He Did for Lydia (Acts 16:13-14); (2) Baptism Is Applied to Christian Parents Who Trust in Christ, like Lydia, and Is also Applied to All Those Within the Whole Household as well (Acts 16:15).

I. God First Opens the Hearts of Those Who Trust in Christ Alone for Their Eternal Salvation, as He Did for Lydia (Acts 16:13-14).

A. As the apostle Paul was preaching and establishing churches in the province of Macedonia, he and his fellow ministers came to a chief city in that part of Macedonia, known as Philippi (which is located in modern Greece). As Paul looked for opportunities in which to bring converts to Jesus Christ and into the Church of Christ, he came upon some women who had met along the side of a river to pray. Seeing this as an open door for him to speak to these women about their need of Jesus Christ, Paul sat down with them and began to speak unto them the Gospel (i.e. the good news) of Jesus Christ.

B. At this point, the historical narrative found in the Book of Acts focuses on a particular woman that was among the women praying by the riverside outside Philippi. Her name was Lydia.

1. We are informed by the Holy Spirit that Lydia was from the city of Thyatira which was situated on the east side of the Aegean Sea (in what is now modern Turkey).

2. She was "a seller of purple" we are told, which means that she likely had a lucrative business in which she sold cloth that had been

dyed in purple, a commodity that was in great demand at that time, particularly among the wealthy.

3. It would appear that Lydia was a widow and unmarried, for she had a family (or a “household” according to verse 15), and yet the “household” is called “her household” rather than “her husband’s household”.

4. And though she was a Gentile from the city of Thyatira, and had a Greek name (which points to the fact that she was a Lydian, named for the ancient province of Lydia in which Thyatira was located), she had apparently become at some point one who “worshipped God” (“a God-worshipper”, which means that she had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion). She obviously took her religion seriously because here she had assembled with other women (of the Jewish religion) who had gathered together to pray.

a. But consider, dear ones, that though Lydia was very religious and very committed to her religion, she had not yet come to trust in Jesus Christ alone for her eternal salvation. Contrary to the view of many in the world today and in churches today, there are not many different roads to heaven, there is only one way; and Jesus, the Son of God, confirmed this when He declared, “I am **the way, the truth, and the life**: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Note that Jesus did not say that He was one of many possible ways to God the Father and to heaven, but rather “**the way**” i.e. the one and only way to God the Father and to heaven. For only Jesus Christ has died and borne the sin and God’s judgment for sin on the cross on behalf of all sinners who will trust Him.

b. Thus, let us never think that simply because we are religious (and even sincerely religious like Lydia) that our sincerity in itself is our salvation from sin and hell (Proverbs 14:12). No, just as Lydia had to come to cast herself by faith upon Christ and upon His mercy for her salvation (though she was very religious), so must we all do, if we are to

enjoy the forgiveness of all our sins and if we are to inherit eternal life in heaven.

C. There is one other very notable observation made by the Holy Spirit in this portion of Holy Scripture that we must not overlook. The stated reason and cause why Lydia paid careful attention to what Paul preached, and the stated reason and cause why Lydia embraced by faith the good news of Jesus Christ was not due to something within her at all, but was due to the power of the Lord in efficaciously and powerfully opening her heart, her understanding, and her will to embrace the good news of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:14).

1. You see, dear ones, none of us would come to Christ if it merely depended upon us (in and of ourselves) to will to come to Christ (Remember, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” Romans 3:11). The Bible, in fact, describes all who are outside of Jesus Christ as dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:4-5). Before Christ comes to us and sovereignly opens our hearts to trust in Him for our forgiveness, to trust in Him to be our righteousness, and to trust in Him to grant us freely everlasting life, we are all like Lazarus dead and buried in a tomb—a tomb of sin. Just as Lazarus did not have the strength or ability to will himself to become alive physically apart from the free grace and power of Christ who gave Him life and made him able and willing to come forth from that tomb, so not one of us has the strength or ability to will ourselves to become alive spiritually from the grave of our trespasses and sins apart from the free grace and power of Christ, who must give us life and make us willing to cast ourselves upon His mercy and to receive by faith His forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life (John 6:44, the word “draw” is the same Greek word used in John 21:11).

2. You see, dear ones, if it depended on us to come to Christ, we would never do so because we are, by the nature inherited from

Adam, dead to Christ. But when the Lord mightily and efficaciously opens our hearts and makes us willing, He works within us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). This the Lord did with Lydia, and this the Lord has done with every single person who has ever received by faith alone Jesus Christ as his/her only hope of eternal salvation. It is as Jonah declared from the belly of the whale, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). You see, salvation is not partly from the Lord and partly from you or me, but rather our faith in Christ and the promise of salvation He offers is entirely a free gift of the Lord, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). How will you know if the Lord has opened your heart? You will know (at least in part) by the simple fact that you desire to come to Christ and to rest in Him as your only hope of forgiveness, as your only hope of righteousness, and as your only hope of everlasting life, not looking to yourself, but away from yourself to Christ, and by the simple fact that you rest for your salvation not in anything you can do or anything within you, but in Christ alone and His imputed righteousness. This is what the Lord did for Lydia when He opened her heart to hear and to receive the good news of Jesus Christ. And rejoice, dear ones, for this is what the Lord has done for each of you who is looking in faith alone to Christ alone for your eternal salvation.

II. Baptism Is Applied to Christian Parents Who Trust in Christ, like Lydia, and Is also Applied to All Those Within the Whole Household as well (Acts 16:15).

A. At this point in the text, we learn that Lydia was baptized as she received by faith alone the promise of salvation made unto her in the good news of Jesus Christ. Clearly, the Scripture teaches that all adults who come to faith in Jesus Christ from outside the Church of Christ (like Lydia) ought to be baptized. But carefully note that though Lydia as the head of her household heard Paul preach and received the promise of

salvation made unto her, she was not the only one who was baptized. For the text goes on to say, “And when she was baptized, **and her household**” or family (Acts 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16). We have already observed that Lydia was most likely a widow and unmarried, for it was **her** “household” and no husband is mentioned. So who does that leave as a part of Lydia’s household or family that were baptized? Children, and perhaps servants who lived under the authority of her roof. As we consider who are proper recipients for water baptism, I would like to ask at this point, “Are small children (even infants) members of a household?” Clearly, Lydia, being an adult convert from outside the Church of Christ was a proper recipient for water baptism. But those in her household or family, the Bible also teaches, were proper candidates for water baptism as well. To ask the question (“Are infants and small children members of a household?”) is to receive the answer, for of course, who would deny that infants and small children are members of a household or a family? But let us briefly consider a couple of passages of Scripture to confirm this.

1. **1 Timothy 3:4.** Here the same apostle Paul that baptized Lydia and her household states in this First Letter to Timothy that one who would hold the office of a “bishop” (which is called in other passages of Scripture a pastor or an elder) ought to be able to rule his own house (or household, or family) well. This is the same Greek word translated “house” here (in 1 Timothy 3:4), as is translated “household” in Acts 16:15. In other words, one of the qualifications for a leader in the Church of Christ is that those who live under the roof of his authority must not be out of control, disrespectful, or ill-mannered. Who does Paul include as members of a house, household, or family? Children: “having his children in subjection with all gravity.” A man with children who throw temper tantrums and kick others in the leg is not a man who rules his house or family well. But especially note here that children are included within the house, the household, or family. Nothing is said here by Paul

to infer that he only refers to children twelve years and older (or children who have reached some fictional and unbiblical age of accountability), but rather children of all ages (without qualification) within the house are to be under control (even small children). Thus, the same apostle who baptized Lydia's household states that children (even small children) are members of a Christian household here in 1 Timothy 3:4. If Paul did not remove small children from a "household" when talking about a pastor's family, why should they be removed from Lydia's household when addressing those who were baptized? It will be argued by some that in Lydia's household any children that were baptized were able to profess faith in Christ. But nothing of the kind is stated in Acts 16:15. I would agree that such was the case in the "household" of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:34. But the fact that such information is expressly not stated in the case of Lydia and her household (but is stated in the case of the Philippian jailor) would be reading into the text what is not stated, namely, that the whole household had the ability to consciously profess faith in Jesus Christ. We are not told in Acts 16:15 whether Lydia had infants or small children in her household, but the word "household" (as has been proven from 1 Timothy 3:4) would certainly include (without the need of any further qualification) small children, if any were within Lydia's household.

2. **Genesis 17:12** (Genesis 17:23). Here we see that not only Abraham who believed in the Lord was to be circumcised as a sign and seal of the promise of God's merciful salvation, but the same sign and seal of the promise of God's merciful salvation (namely, circumcision) was to be applied to infant males (the females being represented by the males in the Old Covenant), when the males were only 8 days old (likewise Paul teaches in Romans 4:11 that circumcision was a sign and seal of the imputed righteousness received in justification, and yet that same sign and seal of justification was appointed by God to be applied to infants and small children within the "household" of Abraham). Clearly,

as we consider Genesis Chapter 17, small children (even infants) were included here within believing Abraham's household or family. What is especially significant about circumcision is that it is the Old Testament equivalent to New Testament baptism. What circumcision meant by way of being a merciful sign of God's salvation promise to Old Testament saints and to the small children within their "household", baptism meant by way of a merciful sign of God's salvation promise to New Testament saints and to the small children within their "household" (Colossians 2:12,13).

3. In fact, the Church of Jesus Christ is called a "house" or "household" in 1 Timothy 3:15 and Ephesians 2:19. And children (without any restriction of age) are addressed by the apostle Paul as members of God's household, the Church (in Ephesians 6:1, even as wives are so addressed in Ephesians 5:22, even as husbands are so addressed in Ephesians 5:25, even as children without any restriction of age are so addressed in Ephesians 6:1, even as fathers are so addressed in Ephesians 6:4, and even as servants are addressed in Ephesians 6:5). If children (without qualification) are addressed as members of the household of faith (as are adults), why are they not likewise entitled to the New Covenant sign and seal of that household of faith like the adults (for Jesus said of infants and small children, "Of such [i.e. "of such ones"] is the kingdom of God" Mark 10:14)? Thus, in baptizing infants and small children, we do not seek to introduce something new or novel, something of man's innovation into baptism, but rather we simply seek to be faithful to God's Holy Word, that not only Christian parents who profess faith in Jesus Christ are to be baptized, but their whole household or family as well (which must include all the children of that family as well). The Church of Jesus Christ is called a "**holy** nation" (i.e. a separated and consecrated nation to God in 1 Peter 2:9), and therefore, those who are "holy" (i.e. separated and consecrated to God) ought to be baptized. But carefully note that children (without any qualification in age) of at

least one believing parent are called by Paul, “holy” children (i.e. separated and consecrated to God in 1 Corinthians 7:14 by virtue of being born into a Christian household, like Abraham’s household, like Lydia’s household, and like your household and mine as professing Christians and members of Christ’s Church).

B. As we conclude, I would like to make a couple more remarks.

1. First, we do not believe that the mere administration of baptism forgives the sin of a child or an adult who is baptized. Only Jesus Christ can forgive sin. As was said earlier, baptism is a sign and seal of that forgiveness and cleansing of sin by Christ (our need of that forgiveness and the promise of that forgiveness). Both adult and child who are baptized must receive by faith in Jesus Christ the promise of Christ’s forgiveness (because they are sinners), must receive by faith the promise of Christ’s righteousness credited to their account (because they have no righteousness of their own which they can offer to God for their salvation), and must receive by faith in Jesus Christ the promise of life (because they deserve eternal death in hell).

2. Secondly, thus, everyone who has been baptized (whether adult or child) is bound and obligated by God to act upon their baptism by casting himself/herself upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus who has come to save sinners. We who have been baptized cannot simply ignore and neglect what our baptism means (whether we received baptism as a child or as an adult) and then think that everything will be ok with us and that God will receive us and accept us into His heaven when we die simply because we have been baptized. To the contrary, if we ignore and neglect what our baptism means (namely, our need of Jesus Christ and the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ), we are not excused by God, but rather stand more accountable before God for having treated the Lord’s most precious and holy sacrament of baptism (and the promise of salvation that it represents) with carelessness and contempt. Dear

ones, there is no other way to the Father or to heaven than through a living faith in Jesus Christ as your only hope of eternal salvation. Baptism cannot save you. The Church cannot save you. A minister or pastor, a priest or pope, cannot save you. Your good works cannot save you. Nothing within you can save you. Only Christ, whom God sent into the world to save sinners, only He can save you. And that is what baptism means. Receive Christ by faith alone as He is offered to you in the gospel preached today and as He is offered to you in your baptism. Amen.

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