

# CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Should Infants Be Included?



Pastor Timothy L. Johnson

# Christian Baptism

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of Christian baptism, and more specifically infant baptism, is not something I enter into lightly or without much prayer. Few doctrines can cause as much heartfelt tension and debate as this one. In my time of parish ministry I have heard more questions about this doctrine than almost any other. That tells me that people are confused and are honestly seeking a Biblically clear, simple and concise study on this doctrine. This study is being presented for that reason.

Another reason for this study is to deal with the misconceptions about baptism. Many people have a deep conviction about baptism: what it is, what it is not, who, when and how you should be baptized or not baptized, etc. As a result, discussions on baptism often turn defensive and sometimes far too personal.

Why the intense emotion? Could it be that many have developed their convictions based upon what they think is best or what they have heard or been taught since childhood, but they have never really searched the Scriptures for themselves? When their convictions are challenged and they cannot support them with Scripture, they get embarrassed or upset. Would it not be more advantageous to develop your own convictions based upon what you have studied and become convinced of in Scripture? Then any discussion on baptism can become an opportunity to grow in the Word of God. I pray this study will help you do just that.

Finally, I do not claim to be the final authority on this doctrine. I simply desire to share what I have become convinced of in my study of Scripture. My only request is that you wait to draw your final conclusions until after you have completed this study.

Perhaps you may question something only to find a clearer and more complete explanation later in the study. Proverbs 27:17 says, "*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*" Let us agree with one another to be sharpened through the sharing of God's Word together. May God bless you and may Christ be glorified!

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT BAPTISM IS NOT

Allow me to be as clear and concise as possible in regard to what baptism is not. Baptism is not the Savior. It does not and should not replace Christ Jesus our Lord. Those who believe that baptism alone provides them an automatic ticket to heaven are deceived. Jesus declared that He alone is the way, the truth and the life and that no one can come to the Father but through Him (John 14:6).

Some churches and people give the impression that baptism is their Savior. They speak more about it than they do about Christ. Perhaps you have been to funerals where the pastor speaks much about baptism; almost to the exclusion of Christ. You leave the funeral with the idea that the deceased is in heaven just because he or she was baptized. Some people and pastors seem more concerned about whether or not you have been baptized than they are about your relationship with Jesus Christ. I agree wholeheartedly with Lutheran theologian Carl F. Wisloff who said, “My trust is not in the certificate of baptism ... rather, my trust is in Christ, in Whose Name I am baptized!”<sup>1</sup> Let us never forget that Jesus Christ alone is the Savior.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

There is much talk about the age of accountability. At what point in life are people accountable for their sin? Ask yourself that question while reading the following Bible verses.

*"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me," (Psalm 51:5).*

*"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ... and were by nature children of wrath," (Ephesians 2:1, 3).*

*"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned," (Romans 5:12).*

*"There is none righteous, not even one ... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:10, 23).*

*"Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God," (Romans 3:19).*

The above verses clearly point out that sin and its consequences do not discriminate by age. *"All have sinned."* Our very nature is sinful from the beginning of life. We are even conceived in iniquity.

Add these facts to Jesus' words in John 3:3, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" According to this verse, what must happen in order for one to see the kingdom of God? Jesus answers in John 3:5, "*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*"

Jesus says in John 3:7, "*Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*" Does this include all people? Must every person be born again to enter the kingdom of God? Must babies be born again? Jesus says in John 3:6-7, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again.*" I do not know of any Scriptural exceptions to being born again.

Some will argue that children are exempt from their need to be born again based upon Matthew 19:14, "*But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'*" Look at this verse very carefully. It does not say that children automatically belong to the kingdom of heaven. The verse simply says the kingdom of heaven belongs to the children. Jesus was responding to the disciples' rebuke of parents bringing their children to Him. The disciples were suggesting that Jesus had no time for the children. In essence, they were telling the parents that the kingdom of heaven was only for adults and not for children. Jesus rebuked them and clearly indicated that the kingdom of heaven was available even to children.

Given all that has been studied thus far, my conclusion to this point is that all people, including children and babies, are accountable to God for sin since they all have a sinful nature and must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, the

age of accountability, from a reasonable and Biblical viewpoint begins at birth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

Since people are by nature children of wrath and must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God and this certainly includes babies, how then can this happen? I believe it happens by faith and baptism. Mark 16:16 says, "*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*"

Note the incredible importance of faith. If you have no faith, it does not matter whether you have been baptized or not. Those who disbelieve are condemned. This Scripture is very clear in that regard.

A couple of assumptions are often made in regard to Mark 16:16. The first assumption is "**One has to first believe and then be baptized for salvation.**" However, the word *and* in this verse does not necessarily indicate order (first believe and then be baptized). If I say that I had bacon and eggs for breakfast, does that necessarily mean that I ate the bacon first and then the eggs? No. I use the conjunction *and* to simply put the two together. The conjunction *and* is a connector and order cannot be assumed without a clear qualifier of order (e.g., He who has *first* believed and *then* is baptized). Since the text does not give us any indication of a qualifier, you can only connect the words *believe* and *baptize* rather than declare an order. Faith and baptism are simply being connected.

A second assumption is "**Certainly an infant can't believe.**" First of all, if this is true, then Mark 16:16 says they shall be condemned since disbelief brings condemnation.

Second of all, Jesus says in Matthew 18:6, "*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*" Jesus used the term *mikros* which Greek-English lexicons and Greek dictionaries will tell you means little ones or small ones or least ones. Our word micron is a derivative of this word. In this context, the word *mikros* refers to small children. Jesus said that these small children could believe in Him. King David prayed to God in Psalm 22:9, "*Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts.*"

**Why do we find it so hard to believe that an infant can have faith?** Do we really think that adult understanding makes a stronger faith? Jesus says in Matthew 18:3, "*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*" The word that Jesus uses for children is *paidion*. Greek-English Lexicons and Greek dictionaries will tell you that this word means young child. A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament by James Strong defines *paidion* as a childling or up to a half grown child.<sup>2</sup> A child is half his or her height by the age of about two and a half years old.

*Paidion* is also used in Matthew 19:14 where Jesus says, "*Let the children (paidion) alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*"

I believe that adults need to return to that simple and fast trust of a child in regard to Jesus. If you even hinted at the possibility that there might be a monster in a closet, there is no way a three year old would dare to go near the closet. In fact, his faith

in what you told him would be so strong that he would probably not venture near the closet alone until he got older and began to question you more. It seems we question things more as we get older. The disciples in the Matthew 18 text were questioning who was the greatest. Jesus told them they needed to repent and become like children (*paidion*) and that they should not hinder these little ones (*micros*) who believed in Him.

**Who receives things easier, an adult or a child?** Jesus told the disciples in Mark 10:15 that "*whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child (paidion) will not enter it at all.*"

Give adults a rattle and what will they do? They will quickly examine it and determine whether or not they want it. Babies, however, will be more apt to take the rattle without much consideration and put it in their mouths. The younger you are, the less factors that enter into your decision process. Therefore, your inhibitions will likely be less when it comes to the kingdom of God. The fact that adults are to repent and become like children seems to support this idea. At the very least, Jesus is placing the child's receptivity of the kingdom in a much higher position than the adult's receptivity of the kingdom. I believe I am justified by concluding that the younger you are the more receptive you are and the older you are the more inhibited you tend to be, especially toward the kingdom of God.

**It is Biblically wrong to say that a child, even a baby, can't receive grace from God and believe.** The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15 "*that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" The Greek word used for childhood is *brephos*. Greek-English lexicons and Greek dictionaries define this word as unborn child, embryo,

newborn or infant. In the above text, Timothy knew the sacred writings since he was a baby.

*Brephos* is the same word used of John the Baptist in Luke 1:41, 44 while he was in his mother's womb and leaped for joy when Mary, the mother of Jesus, greeted the expecting Elizabeth. Luke 1:15 says that John the Baptist "*will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.*" *Brephos* is also the same word used of baby Jesus in the Christmas story (Luke 2:12, 16).

Finally, *brephos* is used in Luke 18:15 where it says, "*And they were bringing even their babies (brephos) to Him so that He would touch them.*" Why would parents bring their babies to Jesus so He could touch them? Mark 10:16 says, "*He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.*" Obviously, Jesus and the parents thought these babies could receive a blessing from God.

Let us ever remember that our faith originates in Jesus. He is the "*author and perfecter of faith.*" (Hebrews 12:2). When our eyes are on Him, He starts working in us that which is pleasing in His sight. Hebrews 11:6 says, "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him.*" Faith in Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation and for any work to be considered pleasing to God. But this faith is not limited to adults. Even children and especially small children (*micros, paidion and brephos*) can have such faith and receive the kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# BAPTISM IN SCRIPTURE AND THE EARLY CHURCH

As you look in Scripture you will find several associations with baptism. These associations have been grouped below with their corresponding Scriptures.

### A. Membership into the Church

*"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body," (1 Corinthians 12:13).*

*"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).*

### B. United with the Triune God

*"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19).*

### C. United with Christ

*"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death ... For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death ..." (Romans 6:3-5).*

*"Having been buried with Him in baptism," (Colossians 2:12).*

*"For all of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ," (Galatians 3:27).*

### D. Forgiveness of Sins

*"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the*

*name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins," (Acts 2:38).*

*"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name," (Acts 22:16).*

*"Having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word," (Ephesians 5:26).*

#### E. The Holy Spirit

*"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire," (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).*

*"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," (John 3:5).*

*"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and were all made to drink of one Spirit," (1 Corinthians 12:13).*

*"Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," (Acts 2:38).*

#### F. Salvation

*"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved," (Mark 16:16).*

*"Be saved from this perverse generation! So then, those who had received his word were baptized," (Acts 2:40-41).*

In the context of the Flood bringing death to many and new life to Noah's family, *"Baptism now saves you," (1 Peter 3:21).*

Membership into the Church universal, uniting with the Triune God and Christ, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and salvation are all associated with baptism in the above verses. You may

wonder whether these associations are really that simple or whether they should be understood in such a simple way.

**Did the early church teach these things?** Below are some documented quotations from those who were leaders in the early Church.

**Polycarp** was a disciple of the Apostle John who lived from 69-155 A.D. He was obviously baptized as an infant. At the age of eighty-six, he said the following at his martyrdom, "Eighty and six years have I served the Lord Christ," (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9:3).

**Justin Martyr** was martyred in 165 A.D. In one of his apologies, written about 148 A.D., he declared that there were among Christians in his time many persons of both sexes, some 60 and some 70 years old, who had been made "disciples of Christ from their infancy and continued undefiled all their lives," (*Apologia* 1:15). Seventy years from 148 A.D. takes us back to the very days of the apostles. How could infants become disciples of Christ? I believe a review of the Biblical associations with baptism answer this question. It's interesting that in his *Dialog with Trypho the Jew*, Justin Martyr states that baptism is the circumcision of the New Testament.

Justin Martyr also said, "Then we bring them to a place where there is water, where they are regenerated in the same way as we were," (*Apologia* 1:61). He seems to be saying that water baptism brings regeneration. Titus 3:5 says, "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*"

**Tertullian** was born in 145 A.D. which was only 50 years after the Apostle John died. John's disciple, Polycarp, was alive

during the first ten years of Tertullian's life. Tertullian was the only voice raised against infant baptism in the generation following the apostles. He argued against infant baptism on the ground that since baptism offers "remission of sins", why not postpone it as long as possible, so that the sins of a lifetime could be washed away all at once (*De Baptismo*, 18). Tertullian's lone argument indicates that infant baptism was being practiced and that baptism was understood as a means of forgiveness.

**Irenaeus** (died 202) was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John. He said, "He [Jesus] came to save all through himself; all, I say, who through him are regenerate in God: infants, and children, and youths, and old men," (*Against Heresies* 2:22:4). Irenaeus often used regenerate and baptize interchangeably.

**Origen** was born 185 A.D. and died 254 A.D. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were Christians. He traveled widely and visited many of the churches founded by the apostles. He has been called the most learned of the early fathers. He said, "The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. The apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of the divine sacraments, knew there are in everyone innate strains of [original] sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit," (*Commentaries on Romans* 5:9). Elsewhere Origen wrote in his *Homily on Luke 14*, "Infants are to be baptized for the remission of sins."

**Cyprian** was the Bishop of Carthage from 248 to 258 A.D. The question came up at the Council of Carthage as to whether or not infants should be baptized before reaching the age of 8 days. No question was raised about the practice of infant baptism itself; only the matter of how early it should be done. Speaking on behalf

of the Council, Cyprian said, "We are all of the opinion that the grace and mercy of God must not be denied to any man who is born into the world. When even the greatest of sinners, as soon as they believe, receive the remission of sins, and no one keeps them away from Baptism and grace, how much less ought we to keep away a child who is newly born, has committed no sin, and only by carnal descent has carried the old contagion of death," (*Letters* 64:5).

**Augustine** (died 430 A.D.) said the following in regard to infant baptism, "What the universal Church holds, not as instituted [invented] by councils but as something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority," (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 4:24:31).

These early church fathers clearly indicate that infant baptism was being practiced and thought of water baptism, even for infants, as regeneration and remission of sins. Given the previous Scriptures and these testimonies of the early church fathers, baptism, at the very least, is a very important factor in a person's salvation and relationship with Christ.

Since an infant is accountable to God for sin (refer back to chapter two) and one must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven and baptism is closely linked with being united in Christ, forgiveness, and even salvation, it does not seem wise to neglect bringing a child or infant to the Lord in baptism where they can be clothed in Christ. Keep in mind that adults are to receive the kingdom of God like a child and that Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith. So why not bring babies to the Author of our faith in baptism where they can meet Christ and receive Him in faith? Ephesians 2:8-9 say, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not*

*as a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Baptism is a means of grace by which parents can bring their children to Christ in whom their children can receive by faith.

Often the question is asked, "**What about those children who are not brought to Christ in baptism?**" I am not to make this judgment for God's Word has already spoken. However, I believe the parents are accountable for neglecting the means of grace by which their child can meet Christ. Parents have the power to affect generations with their sin and they also have the power to affect generations with their faith. Raising children in the faith is a serious responsibility.

**What about those that die before they can be baptized?**

God knows the intention of hearts. He also knows all in His divine foreknowledge. He even fashioned each of us in our mother's womb and made us in His image. I am quite comfortable leaving this question in the hands of our gracious, merciful and loving God. For me to say any more is to go beyond Scripture.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IS INFANT BAPTISM IN SCRIPTURE?

A common objection to infant baptism is that Scripture does not say that infants should be baptized nor are there any examples of it. If I accept that argument without question, then what should I do with the similar argument, “Scripture does not say that women should partake of the Lord's Supper nor are there any examples of it?” Without a doubt, these arguments are flawed.

Actually, there are suggestions of infant baptism in Scripture. Three households were baptized. Lydia and her household were baptized in Acts 16:15. The Philippian jailer and all his household were baptized in Acts 16:33. The Apostle Paul said he baptized the household of Stephanas in First Corinthians 1:16. The odds are in favor that there were small children, if not an infant or two in these households. Their households were much more extended than ours are today and often included relatives and servants.

Also, God established circumcision with Abraham in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis as a way to be received into a covenant relationship with Him. This was to be for all who were uncircumcised beginning with every male child who was eight days old. The Old Testament provided a means by which people, even infants, could enter into a covenant relationship with God.

The New Testament extends circumcision beyond the physical. *"In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the*

*working of God, who raised Him from the dead," (Colossians 2:11-12).*

In the New Testament, baptism replaces circumcision. Certainly this new covenant outshines the old covenant for it is more inclusive. Galatians 3:27-29 says, *"For all you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."*

Just as circumcision brought one into a covenant relationship with God, so baptism in Christ now brings one into a covenant relationship with God. Fidus, a minister around the year 250 A.D., asked the Council (that Cyprian was on) whether or not they should deny baptizing infants before they were eight days old. The Council declared that "the mercy and grace of God are to be denied to none from the moment he is born," (*To Fidus 1:2*).

Without a doubt, infant baptism has much more Biblical and historical support than does the dedication ceremony for children. However, are not parents also dedicating their children to the Lord when they bring them to Christ in baptism? So then why is the practice of infant baptism questioned by some?

According to Dr. Wall, an eminent church historian and scholar, infant baptism was only officially questioned four times in history. "In the first 400 years Tertullian suggested a delay of infant baptism in some cases and Gregory seemed to practice such delay with his own children. About 700 years later (1130 A.D.) a sect arose against infant baptism because they thought infants were incapable of receiving salvation. However, their following dwindled away until the rising of the German anti-infant baptists in

1552.”<sup>3</sup> According to Dr. Wall these views then began to grow.

Some will argue that Scripture suggests you must repent before being baptized. How can infants repent? This is a reference to Acts 2:38. Obviously Peter is speaking to any who can understand. But what is he saying in Acts 2:38-39? Peter says to the people in Jerusalem, “*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you **and your children** and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself,*” (emphasis mine).

In these verses, is not the promise for you, your children, and all who are far off? Who does the calling? Who gives the power to respond or repent? It all comes from the Lord our God. Jesus says in John 6:44, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*” And what does Jesus say about repentance in Matthew 18:3, “*Unless you repent and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*”

Who is more likely to receive the power given by God to repent, an adult or a child? Remember Mark 10:15, “*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.*” A child receives the things of God much more readily than an adult. Likewise it is actually more reasonable to believe a child, or more so an infant, will repent easier than an adult. When a child or infant is brought to Christ in baptism, that little one will respond in repentance and faith much more readily than the adult. The intellectual mind of the adult cannot comprehend how this can be, but thanks to God that salvation is by grace rather than the ability or intellectual capacity to understand.

In conclusion to this chapter, Scripture does not rule out infant baptism. If anything it seems to encourage it. Jesus says in

Mark 10:14, "*Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*"

## CHAPTER SIX

### HOW MUCH WATER SHOULD BE USED?

There are basically three forms of applying water to the one being baptized. They are immersion, sprinkling, and pouring. Immersion is to fully submerge the person under the water. Sprinkling is to spray or drip water from the fingers onto the baptismal candidate. Pouring is cupping the hand or using a dipper and pouring water over the head of the candidate. Scripture does not give specific instructions as to the form of applying water in baptism. Therefore, methods vary much all over the world.

Some will argue that the Greek word *baptizein* (to baptize) only means to immerse into the water. However, the word is used differently throughout the New Testament. In Luke 11:38 a certain Pharisee was surprised that Jesus did not wash before the meal. The word used in the Greek for wash is *baptizein*. Certainly the Pharisee didn't expect Jesus to immerse Himself in a bowl of water before the meal.

In Mark 7:4 it says, "*And when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.*" The words cleanse and washing are from the Greek word *baptizein*. Again, does this mean you should immerse yourself before eating? Would the people totally immerse huge copper pots to clean them? I'm guessing not. It simply means they washed them.

The word washings is used in Hebrews 9:10 for the same Greek word. Only this time Hebrews 9:19-21 clearly define it as

sprinkling.

Before His ascension, Jesus addressed His disciples using the same Greek word as a verb in Acts 1:5, "*You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*" That baptism took place on Pentecost. The Apostle Peter described what was happening at Pentecost by using the prophecy of Joel which says, "*I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind,*" (Acts 2:17). What Joel called "*pour forth*" Christ called "*baptized*". The disciples were not immersed into the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. Given all the above, *baptizein* can mean immerse, wash, sprinkle, and pour.

Some will read in the Bible the various baptisms that took place and suggest that only immersion is described. Such people are reading immersion into the text. There is not a single instance in the New Testament where it can be proved that a baptism was done by immersion.

Some will argue that Jesus was baptized by immersion since He "*came up from the water*" in Matthew 3:16. First of all, if you are in water you must go up to get out of the water. Does this mean Jesus was totally immersed in the water? Many times I have waded down into the water up to my knees and then came up from the water. My coming up from the water didn't necessarily mean I was totally immersed in the water. Neither can one say that Jesus' coming up from the water means that He was totally immersed in the water. To say so is reading more into the text than is there. Jesus may well have been immersed but the text does not tell us that.

The same can be said when Philip and the Ethiopian "*went down into the water*" for baptism in Acts 8:38. Some argue that the Ethiopian had to be immersed since they "*went down into the*

*water.*" However, the text says that Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water together. If you apply the phrase "*went down into the water*" as meaning one was immersed, then you have to apply it to both the Ethiopian and Philip. So now we must conclude that both were immersed. With this thought we can create a new doctrine – in order for baptism to be valid, both the one baptized as well as the baptizer must be immersed. Can you see the danger of reading into a text of Scripture? Again, this text does not tell us how Philip baptized the Ethiopian. Perhaps Philip did use immersion. Perhaps he used a bowl or cupped his hands together and poured water over the Ethiopian. We do not know exactly how the baptism was done.

Often Romans 6:4 is brought up in the discussion of immersion, "*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*" Some insist that the imagery here implies immersion. The person is buried under water symbolizing his or her death with Christ and then raised out from under the water symbolizing their resurrection to life in Christ. This is a wonderful picture, but keep in mind that the symbolism only fits today's Western culture. Jesus was not buried under the ground like we think of buried. He was laid in a tomb upon a ledge protruding from the wall. Some cultures bury their dead by placing them on poles up in the air. Can you imagine how they might interpret Romans 6:4? This text says nothing about how a person should be baptized. It simply tells us that we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection through baptism. If the form of baptism was meant to be an issue in this text, certainly it would have been very clear.

First Corinthians 10:2 says, "*All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*" But we know that the Israelites were never immersed in the cloud. The cloud was either in front, behind, or sometimes right above them, but they were never in the cloud. And yet the text says they were baptized in the cloud. Similarly the Bible says they were baptized in the sea. Again, this does not mean they were immersed in the sea since the water stood back as a wall on both sides of them.

There are Bible texts that make it hard to believe that immersion was used in some baptisms. Acts 2:41 tells us that 3000 people were baptized in Jerusalem after Pentecost. Where did all that water come from? They had no rivers or lakes. In Acts 16:30-34 the Philippian Jailer and his household were "*immediately*" baptized in that "*very hour of the night.*" This most likely occurred in the prison yard where it is unlikely that there was even a pool.

How much water should be used in baptism and what form should be used? If this were important, the Bible would have been very clear. All we know is that we are to baptize using water (Acts 10:47) in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Insisting on more form places one in danger of committing deeds of the flesh: "*disputes, dissensions, factions*" (Galatians 5:20). Enough of this already exists in the Church. Let us not create doctrines that go beyond the Word of God.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### AFTER BAPTISM

#### **The Validity and Effect of Baptism:**

Parents, who take consolation entirely in the fact that their child is baptized, as if they have discharged their entire spiritual duty, need to understand an important distinction between the validity and effect of baptism. Any baptism conducted in the Christian faith by applying water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is a valid baptism. No other baptism is needed. There is "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (Ephesians 4:5). However, the effect of that baptism is determined by faith. Mark 16:16 says, "*He who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*" Baptism is not effective apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

It has already been argued that very small children, including infants receive Christ in faith at baptism. However, just like the physical life of the baptized person, the spiritual life of the baptized must be fed lest it starve and die. Parents are to "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it," (Proverbs 22:6). We are to make disciples, baptizing them and "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,*" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus says in Matthew 4:4, "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*" The Word of God is food for the soul.

Children will learn from their parents. If parents live a Godly life that involves their children in worship, devotion, Bible study, prayer and Christian service, then their children will probably learn to do the same. The opposite is true as well. If

parents neglect some or all of these things, their children probably will too.

Young children will accept the teachings of their parents without question even though their behavior may indicate otherwise at times (they have a sinful nature just like adults). The acceptance of their parents' teachings in regard to Christ and spiritual life is a tutored faith. They believe because of what they are being taught. Children are much more receptive that way. However, as they develop, they will begin to think more and more independently of their parents. At some point in their development (this varies for each individual) they will either continue to accept what they have been taught or reject it.

If their parents have taught them to be spiritually sensitive, they will grow in the knowledge of their sin and their need for a Savior. By God's grace, such children will acknowledge their sin and grow in their desire for daily repentance. They will become more receptive of Christ's Spirit and seek to know and follow Him more. This may come about very abruptly or very gradually. In any case, such children will have undergone a conscious conversion where they can verbalize their need and acceptance of Christ in a very personal way. Such a faith has moved from a more tutored faith to a conscious faith. As a result, the child's infant baptism is not only valid but remains effective based upon their continuance in faith.

Contrary to the above, if genuine spiritual life has not been a priority in the home, then children will have trouble not only seeing their sin, but taking it seriously. Hence, they won't see their true need for a Savior. They will not become consciously appreciative of Christ and what He has done for them. They will in essence reject the Spirit of Christ through apathy or even blatant

rejection. At this point a child's infant baptism is still valid but not effective. They have fallen from the faith. Please keep in mind that sometimes children from the best of homes go wayward and those from the worst of homes consciously receive Christ. There is a spiritual battle going on all around us. This fact alone should cause prayerful and careful concern in parents as they raise their children.

### **What about Eternal Security?**

Simply put, this is the belief that once you are saved, you are eternally secure and can never fall away from the faith. Those who accept this doctrine cannot accept that a child who is baptized receives Christ in faith because that would mean they are eternally secure apart from any conscious response of their own. But as was discussed in the previous section, a conscious conversion, where they can verbalize their need and acceptance of Christ in a very personal way, does need to take place in some way and form whenever the child is able to consciously do so. If such a conversion does not take place, the child has fallen from the faith. But the one who believes in eternal security cannot accept the possibility of a child receiving Christ in faith through baptism and then falling away from the faith. Therefore, they reject infant baptism.

Those believing in eternal security will quote many Scriptures to prove their doctrine. For Example, John 10:28, "*I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*" It is true that if you have eternal life, you will never perish. Eternal life means that you live forever. Perishing cannot coexist with eternal life in an individual. It is also true that no one can snatch a soul out of God's hand. However, this

verse does not rule out a person walking away from God under their own volition and rejecting eternal life through Jesus.

Another verse used is Romans 8:39, "*[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" This verse contains a condition, as do most, to the inseparable love of God. This inseparable love of God is found in Christ Jesus.

This theme is evident in the following texts and emphasized in bold by me: Ephesians 1:5, "*He predestined us to adoption as sons **through Jesus Christ to Himself,***" Ephesians 1:13, "***Having also believed,** you were sealed in Him,"* and First Peter 1:5, "*You are protected by the power of God **through faith.***" These verses all have the conditions of trusting in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:26 says, "*For you are all sons of God **through faith in Christ Jesus,***" (bold added). Faith in Christ is the condition for eternal security. This is not a one time faith, but an all the time faith. For this reason, 2 Corinthians 13:5 says to "*test yourselves to see if you are in the faith.*"

Look at many of the warnings in Scripture in regard to falling away from the faith. First Timothy 4:1 says, "*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith.*" Hebrews 6:4-6 says, "*For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away. . ."* Romans 11:19-21 says, "*'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.*" Look for yourself at some other

warnings in Scripture (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Ephesians 5:5-7; 2 Peter 2:14-22).

These warnings should convince us of the necessity to live a life of daily repentance. Not a day goes by where we are not guilty of sin. First John 1:8 says, *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”* It is of great importance that we live a life of daily repentance where confession is not just words, but a state of being or a heart attitude. First John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

I do not accept unconditional eternal security (once saved always saved). I do, however, accept conditional eternal security. As long as someone is living a life of repentance and trusting in Jesus Christ for their forgiveness and salvation, they are eternally secure. Faith in Jesus Christ is the condition to being eternally secure. I can ask myself, "Do I trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior?" Since I am trusting in Him, I know without any doubt that I have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Even the Old Testament supports the concept of conditional security. In the Passover account of Exodus 12, the Hebrews needed to apply blood above their doorposts and stay inside in order to be saved from the angel of death. What a picture of our need to remain under the blood of Christ. In Numbers 35 the killer was safe from his avenger as long as the killer stayed within the city of refuge. If the killer stepped outside the city of refuge, the avenger was allowed to kill him. The Hebrew and the killer had total security as long as they remained within the condition. This is nothing less than conditional security. And for Christians, faith in Christ Jesus is the condition for eternal security.

Therefore, I do not believe that a baptized child necessarily has eternal security. As a baptized child's thinking and understanding develops, he or she is faced with a choice to continue in a daily relationship with Christ or to forget about it or even reject it. If they don't choose a relationship with Christ (whether by apathy, rebellion or plain rejection) when they are cognitively able to make such a choice, then they have fallen from the faith and are lost. This may come as an abrupt, rebellious choice or a drawn out neglect of Christ and His Word. Similarly the thinking and understanding that develops for those who choose Christ may come very definitely and suddenly or it may come about very gradually. The former will remember a certain time when it all became clear for them. The latter will probably not remember a specific time when they consciously chose Christ. These will just know they have done so and the fruit of their life will confirm it.

**Confirmation:**

Though it may vary much for some, it is believed that the time around eighth and ninth grade is when most youth are developed enough in their thinking that they are ready to move from a tutored faith to a more conscious faith. And so a two or three year Bible course is strongly encouraged at this grade level. Students learn about salvation and how it unfolds throughout Scripture. They learn about the Law of God and how it condemns them. They learn about the Gospel of Christ and how it offers them forgiveness and eternal life. They study basic doctrine and some church history. They learn how to share their testimony and the Gospel. But more important than all this, they are encouraged to seek a closer relationship with Christ and to grow in that

relationship.

After these years of instruction, they are given the opportunity to publicly go before the congregation and share their testimony of how they know they are saved and what difference Jesus makes in their life. Then they express their commitment to serve Christ and His Church. The congregation then accepts their confession and, thus, confirms them in their faith. This is a growing time for all involved to publicly take a stand for Jesus.

Not all students are ready to make such a profession. Though they have been taught about Christ and His Word, some do not come to that place of personal commitment and surrender to Jesus. These students should not be pushed to make a false profession in front of the church. Rather, they should be encouraged to continue in Bible study and the opportunity to be confirmed should always be left open for when they are ready to sincerely confess their faith.

## CONCLUSION

I have not intended for this to be an exhaustive study (though some of you may wonder). However, I have intended to share with you the Biblical study and thinking behind my convictions in regard to infant baptism. It has been my hope and desire that this will help you form your own Biblical convictions in regard to this topic.

In summary, I believe that all are accountable for sin and must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. I believe that baptism is a means by which we bring our children to the Author of our faith where they can meet Christ and receive Him in faith. Thus, these children become a part of God's Kingdom. I believe that if the faith of these children is not nourished by the Word of God, it will be lost and the children will fall away from the faith. I also believe that all who have the cognitive ability to understand their sin and their need for a Savior (whether baptized or not), need to come to the place of a conscious, personal relationship with Jesus Christ where they surrender themselves and commit their life to Christ. This will be a life of daily confession and repentance.

**A major question that everyone should answer** in regard to Christian baptism is "**Who is at work in baptism?**" Is baptism merely an outward act of obedience or is God also doing something in baptism? Review this study and Scripture itself with that question on your mind. If you find that God is active in baptism, then baptism is a means of grace. The next question then is, "Why deny such a means of grace to anyone, including infants?"

Let us all be diligent to base our convictions on our own study of Scripture. It is good to discuss and even lovingly argue

our convictions with one another. However, if the discussion gets emotional or heated, let this be a reminder that perhaps your focus has drifted from Jesus. And always keep in mind that a person who confesses Christ as his Savior and Lord is not your enemy, but your brother or sister. "*The one who confesses the Son has the Father also,*" (1 John 2:23).

Though we can study doctrines such as baptism and even disagree with one another, may we all be unified in upholding the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And let us be ever mindful that this relationship is not only to be private but public. It is well and good to be able to scripturally support a doctrine, but the world needs to see Christians who have a personal relationship with Jesus that extends into the public. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that we would all be one "*so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" May Jesus' prayer be answered in the life of every person who reads this study. To Him be the glory!

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Wisloff, Carl F., Th.D., *Do The Work of an Evangelist* (Minneapolis: AFLC Seminary Press, 1990) p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Strong, James, S.T.D., LL.D. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament* (p. 54) contained in Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D. *The Complete Word Study New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Wall, William, M.A. *The History of Infant-Baptism: together with Mr. Gale's Reflections, and Dr. Wall's Defence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Volume 2 (Oxford: At the University Press, 1844) p. 501. Out of print. 29 January, 2010 <http://www.archive.org/stream/historyofinfantb02wall#page/n7>



## **About the Author**

Pastor Tim Johnson is an ordained minister of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) and has a graduate of theology degree from the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary as well as B.A. degrees in Psychology and the Liberal Arts for the Human Services from the University of Minnesota, Morris.

Tim grew up in Pipestone, Minnesota and surrendered his life to Jesus Christ during his junior year of high school. He first sensed God calling him into the parish ministry immediately after delivering his first sermon as a high school senior during his church's annual youth-led service. Upon graduating from college, he held several positions (mostly in the psychology and management field) before answering God's call to full time ministry.

Since ordination, he has served Free Lutheran congregations in Minnesota and North Dakota. He has also preached and taught as a guest in a number of congregations, conferences, camps and other settings across the United States. He has been married to his wife, Cindy, since 1987 and they have three sons.

Tim believes that the Bible is the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God and that it is the authority in all areas of life and faith. He also believes that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and that a personal relationship with Christ should have first place in everything.

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