

## **Believed and Were Baptized**

by Tricia Berg

*Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. Acts 18:8*

Notice the order given above: first, hear (understand) and believe, then be baptized. (Matt. 13:13, Luke 8:8-10) If there is no way to tell if someone has believed (perhaps they don't speak our language and there is no interpreter), then should we baptize them anyway? That would be rather odd, wouldn't it? But babies have no language at all, nor any memory of the day they supposedly became children of God. I say "supposedly," because it's our own belief that makes us children of God, not any action taken on our behalf for us. (John 1:12-13) The flesh profits nothing refers to there being nothing we can do to obtain salvation (not even be baptized, which comes afterwards) - it's entirely God's work. (John 6:63)

*But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:8-9*

Our part is to humble ourselves and TURN to Him (repent) rather than continuing to struggle against God in unbelief and by rejecting His ways. (John 8:24 - these are sins they actually committed, not sins they "might" commit someday; Ezek. 33:11—we are grafted in to Israel—Rom. 11:17-25; through belief, not through birth or a ritual—Rom. 11:17-25, 2:28-29, Phil. 3:3, Gal. 3:29; Jam. 4:5-10, 1Pet. 5:5-10, Phil. 3:14-21) "Becoming like little children" is not literal, and has nothing to do with baptizing babies. (Matt. 18:3) Likewise, "this promise is for your children" does not refer to their age. (Acts 2:39—see Gal. 4:28, John 13:33, Gal. 4:19, 1John 2:1, 3:7, 18, 4:4, 5:21)

*Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 1 Corinthians 14:20*

One might wonder what the following passage has to do with baptism, but there's a lot there when looking at it closely. One of the issues that has caused splits in the Body of Christ, resulting in the formation of denominations, is baptism—whereas below Paul calls for unity of the faith (Phil. 1:27, 1Cor. 1:11-13, also Peter—1Pet. 3:8, just as Jesus did—John 17:20-23.) Instead of honoring those instructions, the accepted and even beloved tradition of infant

baptism has replaced common sense ("maturity in our thinking," if you will—as in the verse quoted above). This has been an accepted practice for such a long time that most people never question it, but the fact is that it's a Roman Catholic tradition that survived the reformation (the entire point of which was to do away with false teachings and unbiblical traditions). Paul tells us that if we have the maturity he calls for in the passage below, we will not be "tossed about" in our doctrine. How do we do that? By trusting in the Bible rather than tradition for our doctrine. The Bereans were commended for comparing what they were told to the Bible. (Acts 17:10-11)

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may **no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But **that is not the way you learned Christ!**— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to **put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.**** Ephesians 4:11-25*

Continuing on in our observations, we see above that once we BELIEVE, we are to "put off our old self" (which is what water baptism signifies—the death of our sinful flesh). How does a brand new baby put off their old self and their former manner of life? How do they walk in the newness of life (whereas "walking" implies that we DO something that shows we're either washed and regenerated, or not).

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death**? We were **buried therefore with him by baptism***

**into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a **death** like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that **our old self was crucified** with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be **enslaved to sin**. Romans 6:3-6

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age**, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the **washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 2:11-3:8

The fruit of the SPIRIT (who indwells those who genuinely believe) and of the FLESH (which has NOT been washed and regenerated, as evidenced by what the person makes a practice of, its "fruit") are contrasted against one another in Gal. 5:19-24 (also see Matt. 7:17-20). We can tell when someone is enslaved to sin by their actions, can't we? They are not controlled by the Spirit, but by their flesh. Jesus came to SAVE sinners, not so that they could continue in their sin. (Luke 19:10, Mark 2:17—what kind of doctor leaves the patients sick? Certainly the Great Physician doesn't leave His patients enslaved to sin, does He?! Matt. 9:12, Luke 5:31; Rom. 6:1-2, 14-15, 16, John 8:34-36, 2Pet. 2:19, 1Cor. 6:12-13) We all have the sinful nature, but it's what we do because of it that shows how we're filthy on the inside—that filth makes its way OUT. (Mark 7:21-23) That's why we work OUT (not for) our salvation. (Phil. 2:12-16) What we make a practice of (not just slipping and getting back up, but living IN sin) reveals what we are like on the inside.

When someone who has been "baptized" (sprinkled with water) or actually baptized (in the way that symbolizes the death of the sinful self and resurrection into a new creation in Christ, by submersion), at any age, but nevertheless continues sinning deliberately, persistently and prolongedly, it calls into question whether they really believe or not. We should display progress in our walk with the Lord. (1Tim. 4:15, 2Pet. 1:5-11, Heb. 3:12-14, 1Pet. 2:11, Rom. 16:19, 2Cor. 12:20-21) We are told NOT to be deceived into thinking that children of God can behave like the children of the devil. (1John 3:1-10—"His commands" are not keeping the letter of the law, but the spirit of it—Rom. 2:29, 7:4-6, 2Cor. 3:3-6; 1Cor. 15:34, 1John 1:5-10, 2:15-17, 2:28-29, Jam. 4:4-10, Eph. 5:3-12, 1Cor. 6:9-12, 2Cor. 11:3, Gal. 6:7-8, 2Tim. 3:12-13, Jam. 1:12-27, Rev. 3:19, Heb. 12:5-17.)

*No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 1 John 3:6 (Also see John 15:1-10, 1John 5:18.)*

*Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their **fruit does not mature**. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and **bear fruit with patience**. No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." Luke 8:11-18*

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that **Jesus Christ is in you?**—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 2 Corinthians 13:5*

Paul doesn't say to us, "examine your baptism certificate or your church attendance record," but "yourselves." A person "fails to meet the test" when their fruits are BAD, because those are not the fruits of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:9, 13-14) This isn't to say anyone is perfect, but someone who truly believes should be sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit in them and repent when they slip (not continue rebelling against God unashamed). Fellowship with God

and with one another is to be conditioned first upon belief, and then whether or not we are walking in the light. (1John 1:3-2:6, 1Cor. 5-6, John 8:12, Eph. 5:8-12)

But again, baptism in the Bible always comes AFTER belief (Acts 2:41, 8:12-13, 10:45-48, 16:30-34), which is to be confessed with our MOUTHS. If the confession of faith comes right on schedule at a certain age, long AFTER the baptism, then that is NOT biblical. In which case, there would have been no need to divide the Body of Christ over holding to such a tradition. Unbiblical traditions should not have gained a foothold in the way that they did. (Whereas those who call for unity in the church today do so by calling for people to ignore poor doctrine, which is not what Jesus meant.)

*For with the heart one believes and is justified, and **with the mouth one confesses and is saved**. Romans 10:10*

For anyone who was "baptized" with the sprinkling of water as a baby (so they have been told—perhaps there are photos, a video or other records of it), that was not biblical. That's not much different than it would be to approach a sleeping person, tell them the gospel and then proceed to sprinkle water on them, calling them "baptized" and a "child of God." Or how about a screaming person who can't even hear you? My infant daughter slept through her baptism and my infant son cried through his—not that either of them would have understood if they had been paying attention. You can probably guess that we were members of a denominational church at that time. We have told our children that we didn't know better, and they should not consider themselves to be baptized. Sadly, they have no desire to do so now—despite having been "trained in the way a child should go" both at home and in parochial school. (Prov. 22:6) (To be fair, one of our children is not hostile to God, but not exactly devoted, either.) I find it hypocritical to think that we can make someone a child of God by our actions of sprinkling them with water and saying the right words, but if it "didn't stick" (because they don't believe when they've grown up), then it's their fault, not ours? The point is that each one is accountable for themselves. No one can save another. (Psa. 49:7-9, Rom. 14:11-12, Gal. 6:4-5) The good news is that God desires all to be saved, and He hears our prayers. (1Tim. 2:1-6) Never stop praying! (1Thess. 5:17)

"One baptism" refers to that of those who have confessed faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. (Eph. 4:4-6, Rom. 10:9-10, Heb. 4:14, 10:23, 1John 2:23, 4:15, Luke 12:8) The argument that "household" (in the verse at the top) "must" refer to infants is not very compelling—it's the kind of thing that someone would say who is using human reasoning instead of relying on the Bible's wisdom, in order to justify their tradition. In other passages about households, they praised God, spoke in tongues and sent greetings. So

according to the line of thought that includes babies in those households, then the infants also did those other things? (And "plentiful water" was needed for baptism because of submersion, which is unlikely to be done to an infant... John 3:23—you don't need much water to sprinkle a few drops on people. However, the method is not as important as the fact that it should occur after belief.)

I'm not telling anyone what to do, but I will share with you that my husband and I (both having been "baptized" when we were either an infant or toddler when our parents were members of denominational churches) were biblically baptized almost five years ago. We are not out of fellowship with any believers for the sole reason that they are members of denominational churches. However, if they think their "flavor" of Christianity is the only "right" way, that is a problem. Or if they believe EITHER that believers in this age are under the law of the Old Covenant, OR that God has no expectations of His children in this age—those are both serious problems as well. I have just updated and expanded my article (my husband calls it a "book" because it ended up being 82 letter-size pages—LOL) about the Hebrew Roots, Torah observance, Sacred Name, etc. movements (and their treatment of Paul). (You can download a pdf here or read online here, where the Bible cites should pop up.) As for grace being a license to sin, that is covered in the same article and also above. Unrestrained sinning is not a fruit of the Spirit, who empowers us to use self-control. (1Thess. 4:3-8, Rom. 7:5-6, 6:20-23, 1Cor. 6:18-20, Gal. 5:13, 1Pet. 2:16)

Baptism does not save, but was commanded for believers (disciples), who are then to obey the commands of Jesus. (Matt. 28:19-20, John 15:8-17, Mark 12:28-34, Rom. 13:8-14, Jam. 1:25) It goes without saying that those who belong to Jesus love Him and desire to obey Him. (John 14:15-26) His commands are not burdensome, and His yoke is light because of the love we have for Him because He first loved us. (1John 4:9-10, 5:1-3, 2:27-28, 4:13, Matt. 11:28-30—whereas the law WAS a heavy burden—Acts 15:10-11, also see Acts 15:28-29, Rom. 6:14-15, Gal. 2:21.) We are saved by belief, which is probably why baptism was not repeated in the second half of Mark 16:16. Most Bible church pastors will want to discuss this before baptizing anyone, so that the believer doesn't view baptism as a work of salvation. (And denominational church pastors can be expected to "toe the party line" on this issue.) It's a matter of obedience to our beloved Savior—it is not a means of obtaining grace or imparting faith, as some teach. (Rom. 10:17)

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