

A Household Does Not Exclude Infants

Acts 16:11-15

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When we figure out our household budget, we wouldn't exclude the needs of our little children. Why? Because they are members of our household. When we think of training our children, we don't exclude our little ones until they are able to talk. Why? Because even from infancy they are members of our family. Should our babies be excluded from being members of our family for whom we are commanded to provide in every way? I pray not (1 Timothy 5:8).

Though I would never have excluded my little ones from my household when they were infants, I did earlier in my Christian life/ministry exclude them from my household when it came to baptism. By God's grace, I came to see this error/inconsistency in my doctrine/practice.

Let's consider the conversion of Lydia and her baptism, but also the baptism of her household in Acts 16:11-15: (1) God Sovereignly Opened Lydia's Heart to Christ (Acts 16:11-14); (2) Baptism Was Administered Not Only to Lydia, but to Her Household (Acts 16:15).

I. God Sovereignly Opened Lydia's Heart to Christ (Acts 16:11-14).

A. After Paul received the vision from the man in Macedonia (Acts 16:9), Paul, Silas, Timothy, and now Luke (Acts 16:10) set sail for Macedonia (moving from Asia to Europe, Acts 16:11). As the Apostle Paul and the other members of his team arrived in the chief city of Philippi (Acts 16:12), they found no synagogue (10 men were needed to form one). They heard there were a few Jews who gathered on the Sabbath for prayer alongside the river. As Paul and his fellow ministers arrived at the river, there were a few women meeting there for prayer, and they spoke to these women concerning Jesus Christ.

B. There was one particular woman present among the women that listened very intently, Lydia.

1. She was from the city of Thyatira which was situated in Asia Minor (in what is now modern Turkey). A church was established there to whom Jesus sent a letter (Revelation 3:18-29).

2. She was "a seller of purple", which means that she likely had a lucrative business in which she sold cloth that had been dyed in purple, a fabric that was in great demand especially among the wealthy.

3. Lydia was likely a widow and unmarried, for she has a "household" and invites Paul and the others to her house (Acts 16:15).

4. Lydia is a Greek name, and likely was a Gentile proselyte to the Jewish religion.

C. Carefully note the order of salvation given here by the Holy Spirit: (1) She heard the Word preached; (2) God opened her heart so that she received the preached Word; (3) She believed it (Acts 16:14). God first opened her heart by His regenerating power and then she "attended to" or adhered to/believed the gospel. In other words, first, she was born again and then she believed. Until we are born again, we cannot see by faith or enter into God's kingdom (John 3:3).

1. None of us would come to Christ if it merely depended upon us to will to do so (Romans 3:11). Why? Because we are all by nature dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:4-5). By nature, we are all like Lazarus dead and buried in a tomb—a tomb of sin. Just as Lazarus did not have the strength or the 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 ability, desire, or will to come alive spiritually from the grave of our trespasses and sins apart from the free grace and power of Christ, who must first give us life and make us willing to cast ourselves upon His mercy and to receive by faith His forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life.

2. This is what God sovereignly worked in Lydia’s heart, and what the Spirit must work in the heart of everyone who comes to Jesus.

3. Salvation is not partly from God and partly from us (Jonah 2:9). Our faith in Christ is entirely a free gift of God, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). How will you know if the Lord has opened your heart? You will know by the faith He gives you to rest in Him as your only hope of forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life—not looking to yourself, but away from yourself to Jesus. This is what the Lord did for Lydia when He opened her heart to receive the good news of Jesus.

II. Baptism Was Administered Not Only to Lydia, but to Her Household (Acts 16:15).

A. Upon professing her faith in Jesus as a new convert from outside the church, Lydia was baptized. But she was not the only one baptized. For the text goes on to say, “And when she was baptized, and her household” (*oikos*—household baptism—Acts 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16). Since Lydia was most likely unmarried, who does that leave as a part of Lydia’s household that was baptized? Children and possibly servants who lived under the authority of her roof. We don’t know whether Lydia had small children, but we would never exclude small children from a “household” (no qualifications stated—she believed, but it doesn’t state that others in her household did). Small children (even infants) are members of a household. The Apostle Paul believed so.

1. **1 Timothy 3:4.** Here the same Apostle Paul that baptized Lydia and her household states 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 one who rules his own house well (not in terror, but in love and faithfulness, teaching them and setting for them an example to follow). This is the same Greek word (*oikos*) translated “house” here (in 1 Timothy 3:4), as is translated “household” in Acts 16:15.

a. Who does Paul include here as members of a house or household? Children: “having his children in subjection with all gravity.” Paul does not restrict the children here to only those who have professed faith in Christ, but states that 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 (*oikos*) states that children (even small children) are members of a Christian household (*oikos*) 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 baptizing them?

b. It will be objected that if there were any children in Lydia’s household that were baptized, they were old enough to profess faith in Christ. But Acts 16:15 does not make any such qualification. In fact, the profession of faith is conspicuously omitted (in light of Lydia’s adhering to the gospel preached). The word “household” (*oikos*) would certainly not exclude small children if any were present with Lydia.

c. Since the Greek word, *oikos*, first means a house (as in a building), all those who live together under the roof of that house (whether young or old) are called a house/household.

2. **Genesis 17:12-13** (“that is born in thy house”). 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 baby boys (females were represented by the males), when the babies were only 8 days old. It was an outward sign and seal of the gospel (of spiritual promises—Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28-29).

3. **Romans 4:11.** Paul teaches that circumcision was a sign and seal of Christ’s righteousness promised in justification, and yet that same sign and seal of God’s promise of justification was appointed by God to be applied not only to Abraham who believed, but to Isaac who was only 8 days old—to all male infants born in the “house” of Abraham. Circumcision was a sign of justification (a gospel sign).

a. What circumcision meant to Old Testament believers and to the infants within their “household”, baptism meant to New Testament believers and to small children within their “household” (Colossians 2:11-12—baptism signifies a spiritual circumcision—they mean the same thing—removal of sin).

b. Since infants were members of the Old Testament Church (members of Israel—

Israel was the church, Acts 7:38), and since they received circumcision as the sign and seal of the gospel (as did Abraham in Romans 4:11), how could there be absolute silence in the Gospels and the Epistles if infants had been excommunicated from the New Testament Church and were no longer entitled to God's promises as infants were in the Old Testament?

c. We have controversies in the New Testament over circumcision being abolished. Where is the controversy or discussion about infants being cut off from the promises of God and from the sign and seal of those promises (baptism) in the New Testament Church? Nothing would be more important to believing parents than the place of their children in the church, especially if they were cut off from membership in the church (one day they're in, the next day they're out). Since there is no command in the New Testament to forbid baptism to infants, we should assume that infants were included in household baptisms in the New Testament just as they were included in household circumcisions in the Old Testament (Matthew 19:14; Acts 2:39).

4. Let us be clear. This did not mean that all who were circumcised were God's elect (Jacob vs. Esau) any more than that all adults who were baptized in the New Testament were God's elect (Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8 vs. Lydia in Acts 16). Neither circumcision in the Old Testament nor baptism in the New Testament guaranteed salvation or forgiveness. If the promise of the gospel that was signified and sealed in circumcision or in baptism was believed, there was salvation (Jacob, the Philippian jailer). However, if the promise of the gospel signified and sealed in circumcision or in baptism was not believed, there was condemnation—in fact, an aggravated guilt/condemnation (Esau, Judas).

B. **Objection:** The New Covenant pattern is that the sign and seal of baptism require first a profession of faith (Mark 16:16).

1. If Jesus is excluding infant baptism, He is also excluding the infant salvation (for Jesus says that none can be saved without faith). But God is able to save infants (like John the Baptist). Jesus is not addressing infants, but adult converts from outside the church coming to Christ.

2. That order is true when it comes to adults entering into God's gracious covenant from outside the church (like Abraham in Romans 4 and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8), but it is not true when it comes to the children of parents that have already entered into God's gracious covenant (like Isaac; and like children in household baptisms).

C. As we conclude, keep the following points in mind.

1. First, both adults and children who are baptized must receive by faith alone the promise of Christ's forgiveness (because they are sinners). God makes promises in baptism, but those promises are only realized by faith in the life of adults or children that are baptized.

2. Second, we who have been baptized cannot ignore or 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. To the contrary, if we ignore and neglect what our baptism means (namely, our need of Jesus and the promise of salvation through Jesus), we are not excused by God, but rather stand more accountable before God for having treated the precious gift of baptism (and the promise of salvation that it represents) with carelessness/contempt.

3. Third, our only hope of eternal salvation is in Jesus Christ. Water baptism cannot save us. The church cannot save us. A minister or pastor, a pope or priest cannot save us. Our "good works" cannot save us. Nothing within us can save us. Only Jesus, whom God sent into the world to save sinners—only He can save us. That is what baptism means—only Jesus can save us (whether it be an adult or a child that is baptized). Receive Jesus by faith alone as did Lydia.

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