

## What is Keeping Me From Being Baptized?

Wilfried Plock

(Translation: Tabea Kunz)

The last command that Jesus Christ gave his disciples here on earth was: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

But why are there relatively few people in our land, who have been baptized in a biblical way? The following text deals with the most common obstacles. The biggest barrier is:

### 1. Unbelief (Acts 8:36-38)

The Ethiopian had been staying in Jerusalem, the most religious town in the world. But nobody there could show him the way to peace in his heart. God first had to call the evangelist Philip out of a blessed work of revival in Samaria, so that this seeking Gentile could find life in Christ. Shortly afterward he expressed his wish to be baptized, and Philip set just one condition: *"If you believe with all your heart ..."*

Dear reader, do you believe with all your heart? To believe means to trust. Have you entrusted your life to Jesus Christ? Have you come to Him with all the sin and guilt of your life? Is He your Lord and Redeemer? Do you live in a personal relationship with Him? And are you ready to do everything He says in His word? Then you are a believer. Biblical faith is always preceded by repentance and is followed by obedience. Faith is the only prerequisite for baptism. It is indispensable. In God's view unbelief is the biggest obstacle to being baptized. If there is no faith in Christ, there shouldn't be - no, there mustn't be a baptism. Therefore, so-called "infant baptism" makes no sense. Jesus Christ taught: *"He who believes and is baptized ..."* (Mark 16:15-16). Faith is the requirement.

Is there someone reading this, who has not yet really believed? Then Jesus Christ has wonderful news for you: *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved."* That is glorious! *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). However, the Bible also admonishes: *"But he who does not believe will be condemned"*. Which way will you go?

Another obstacle concerning baptism is...

### 2. Sacramentalism

"Sacrament" refers to a ritual or a means of grace. Sacramentalism appeared already in the early church. When in 313 A.D. the Roman State church had come into being, spiritual life was going downhill very rapidly. Genuine, living discipleship gave way to a wishy-washy, dull devotion to dogmas. Still in this same fourth century the well-known Church Father, Augustin, taught: *"The Word comes to the element, it turns into a sacrament"*. That means: bread and wine plus authoritative words (of the priest) result in the sacrament of the Lord's supper; water plus the command of baptism result in the sacrament of baptism, etc. In this way sacraments became the "Baal" of the church.

We jump now to the 20th century to have a look at the customs of baptism in the two main churches. The Roman Catholic Church today teaches about baptism as follows: *"Baptism is the sacrament that delivers the individual from original sin and personal sins, incorporating him into Christ and His church. It is therefore the gate to a new, supernatural life. Baptism is essential for salvation. It brings about the release from original sin, of all personal sins and of all punishment of sins, furthermore the transmission of sanctifying grace, incorporation into Christ, and membership in the church"* (quotation from Neuner-Roos *"Der Glaube der Kirche in den Urkunden der Lehrver-*

*kündigung*", 11th edition, p. 362). That is pure sacramentalism!

The teaching of baptism in the Protestant Church reads similar: *"The church baptizes in obedience to Christ's command. In Holy Baptism the triune God himself accepts the individual, delivers him from the curse of sin and death, gives him as His child all good gifts and incorporates him in His church. Thus the one baptized will daily in thanksgiving desire to believe anew and to demonstrate this through active love ... It corresponds to the order of the church, that the children are baptized soon after birth ... Through baptism the individual becomes a member of the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore children are to be baptized in the church and this is best done during a service of the church ..."* (quotation from the "Kirchliche Lebensordnung" Die Heilige Taufe, Fassung vom 11.11.83 der Evangelischen Landeskirche von Baden).

This too, is sacramentalism. I am personally convinced, that sacramentalism is one of the biggest obstacles to genuine, biblical baptism, and moreover a spiritual blockade for many concerning conversion and rebirth. Why should an individual repent, who was told from his early childhood, that he was already a Christian through infant baptism? An evangelist, greatly used of God in the 19th century, said: *"In Germany the people are wrapped from birth on, in the grave clothes of the doctrine of salvation through infant baptism."*

But the sacramentalists are wrong. Even Martin Luther was in error in this point. His enormous life-work is undisputed, but he never broke completely from Catholic sacramentalism. He even partly fell back into that later on. Today the Roman Catholic Church teaches seven sacraments, the New-Apostolic Church teaches three, the Protestant church two, but the Bible teaches only one "sacrament": *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). Thus there is only one means of salvation. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is keeping me from being baptized?

### 3. Tradition

In Europe there is hardly anybody growing up without some kind of religious tradition. One

might come from the Catholic tradition, another from the Protestant one, another from a free-church type, and still another from a pietistic background. There is an immense number of religious traditions. Surely there is something good in each of them. But all of them contain bad things, too, namely when they deviate from the Holy Scripture.

Therefore we must test every tradition without exception on the basis of the written Word of God. What does the Bible teach about faith and baptism? The New Testament shows a very clear order: WORD - FAITH - BAPTISM - WORK(S).

Matthew 28:18-19: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore (Word) and make disciples of all nations (faith), baptizing them (baptism) ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (work)."*

Acts 2:36-42: *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ (word) ... So those who received his word (faith) were baptized (baptism), and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers" (work).*

Acts 8:5,12: *"Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ (word) ... But when they believed Philip ... (faith), they were baptized, both men and women (baptism)."* - (Note: no infants are mentioned!)

Acts 8:35-40: *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus (word). And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized? ... And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (faith)." And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, ... and he baptized him (baptism). ... and went on his way rejoicing" (fruit/work).*

Acts 16:14-15: *"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul (word). And when she was baptized (baptism) with her household, she besought*

us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord (faith), come to my house and stay (work)."

Acts 16:30-34: "Men, what must I do to be saved?" And they said (word), "Believe in the Lord Jesus, (faith) and you will be saved, you and your household ... And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds (work); and he was baptized at once, with all his family (baptism) ... and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God."

The above concepts were first found in Balthasar Hubmaier's writing, called "*Von der christlichen Taufe der Gläubigen*", published in 1525. Hubmaier, like many others, had to pay for his baptism with his own life. Christians at that time, who realized the Biblical teaching of baptism and carried it out, were often drowned in the same water in which they had been baptized, or they were like Hubmaier burnt to death at the stake. The fact that after the Reformation thousands of believers of the so-called Ana-Baptist movement were killed by other "Christians" may be one of the darkest chapters of church history.

Who can now allow us to turn around the Biblical order: word - faith - baptism - work(s) described above? In "*The Book of Illustrations and Parables*," Charles Haddon Spurgeon tells the story of a servant girl who received the following instructions: "*Marie, sweep out the reception room, mop it with water and then dust the tables, chairs and books!*" How would the master of the house react, if the servant girl simply turned the order upside down? Therefore always pay attention to the Biblical order! When God's order is 1 - 2 - 3, then do not say 3 - 2 - 1! The Biblical order is: hear, believe and be baptized."

Now I can just about hear someone objecting: "But God has accomplished redemption in Christ, hasn't he? At infant baptism he virtually books it on the child's bank account of life. At conversion the individual cashes the cheque and his baptism gets its validity." Humanly speaking, that sounds very nice, I admit. I used to take that view myself for many years. But where can you find that in the Bible?

"But infant baptism is such a nice tradition, isn't it ?..." In the third century A.D. Cyprian already realized that "*tradition without truth is an error secured by age.*"

"But the Scripture mentions household baptisms, doesn't it? Couldn't there have been children and babies among them?" A precise examination of the context of these five passages in question will give us the answer:

a. Cornelius and his household (Acts 10): Those who had received the Holy Spirit were baptized (V.47,48). But the Holy Spirit fell on those, who had heard the word beforehand (V. 44). This fact excludes small children and babies.

b. Lydia and her household (Acts 16): Verse 40 shows that there were "brothers" in Lydia's household, that is, people who believed in Christ. These were the ones who were baptized.

c. The jailer and his household (Acts 16): Paul and Silas preached the word to all who were in the house (V. 32). The jailer and his relatives were baptized (V.33). Then it reads that all his household rejoiced with him, that he had believed in God. First, small children and babies could not have grasped these spiritual proceedings - let alone in the middle of the night! Second, all who were rejoicing, had believed. Unbelievers could hardly have rejoiced about a conversion - let alone in a time, when Christian discipleship could mean risking one's life.

d. Crispus and his household (Acts 18): Vers 8 shows clearly that all the members of the household of this ruler of the synagogue were old enough to believe, as all baptized persons had listened actively.

e. Stephanas' family (1Cor 1:16): It is said of the same group of persons in 1 Cor 16:15 that they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Small children and babies can't do that.

Conclusion: In the Scripture we can clearly see that these household baptisms dealt only with people who could listen to the word of God and believe, who rejoiced about their salvation and who devoted themselves to the service of the Lord right away. If there were children among them, then they were old enough to make their own personal decision. Nowhere does it say that they were brought to their baptism, but that they were baptized of their own free will. That's a big difference. We ask: What is keeping me from being baptized?

#### 4. Disobedience

Surely it is sad if one hasn't known all these things, or if one has been a captive of a false tradition. But if you know all these things from the Bible and you still don't want to obey the Lord - that is worse. Concerning baptism many believers say tersely: *"It's not essential for salvation!"* This reasoning would lead one to conclude, that they only want to do those things for the Lord that are absolutely required for salvation.

Many believers say concerning baptism: *"It's not really so important, is it?"* Please remember, that baptism is a commandment of the Lord. Whenever God's will is involved, there is nothing unimportant. And if you really think it is only a small matter, you should be faithful in these very things that are small. For he who is not faithful in what seems small, how will he be faithful in greater things?

Other Christians argue: *"I have been saved for many years or even decades. Why should I bother to be baptized now?"* The testimonial aspect would of course be missing in such a baptism. But why not get caught up in obedience to God's word? And why not thereby lay a foundation, so that you may convincingly proclaim this teaching of the scripture in the future?

Finally a lot of believers say concerning baptism: *"I know that this is in the Bible, but God must show it to me personally!"* - "Excuse me", I'd like to reply, *"in what way is God to show it to you? Is it not enough that the command to baptize and the examples of baptisms are in the New Testament dozens of times? Does the Lord have to give you an extra revelation also for His other commandments? Could it be that you simply don't want to obey in this point?"*

There is a frightening statement in 1 Samuel 15:23. *"For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."* Rebellion is like idolatry because here one's own will is put above the Lord's will. If this describes you, don't

you want to obey the Lord with all your heart, including in the area of baptism? Obedience means recognition of the divine supremacy. Obedience means the sacrifice of one's own will, and that is the greatest thing that you can ever sacrifice to God. You can sacrifice time, money and strength and still be only partially obedient. But only complete obedience brings about complete blessing!

The attitude of a mature Christian woman once made me glad. Concerning baptism she said to me: *"In everyday life I can often show the Lord only very weakly that I want to obey Him (in speech, in thoughts etc.). But in this point I would really like to show the Lord my full obedience."* Then, though over the age of 60, she was baptized. Wouldn't you like to follow her example? The Lord taught His disciples: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). Please follow Christ also in this point, even if human traditions and opinions contradict. Don't be afraid of the possible loss of prestige. The Lord says: *"How can you believe, who receive glory from one another?"* Or is glory and prestige before men more important to you than glory before God?

What is keeping me from being baptized? Unbelief? Trust in a supposed sacrament? Hanging on to a human tradition? Or disobedience in your heart? Please don't allow anything to hold you back. Look at the commandment and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was baptized by John in the Jordan. Look at the lives of the apostles. They give clear testimony to believer's baptism by immersion. Be encouraged by the example of the first Christians and join those, who regard God's Word higher than human traditions. Give testimony by immersion, that you have died and were raised with Christ. As a child of God, don't you want to present this glorious testimony? May our faithful Lord give you strength and courage to do exactly that.