

## Orthodox Baptism and Biblical Salvation

*Note from Berean Beacon: This article is adapted from the book: Eastern Orthodoxy Illuminated by the Scriptures (Curent: Belgrade, 2009), written by Serbian author, Ivica Stamenkovic. His research is based upon Holy Scripture, as well as primary Orthodox sources. Future articles will further examine in detail other Eastern Orthodox teachings on salvation.*

God's Word teaches that water baptism is an outward symbol to testify that a person is already saved. In contrast, the Orthodox Church teaches that water baptism directly causes the salvation of man. For example, the Orthodox theologian Marinkovic writes,

“The Sacred Mystery of Baptism: This mystery is the gate to enter the Church of Christ, or the engrafting of the wild olive branches onto the tree... Thus, the mystery of baptism is a precondition for man to have salvation from sin and spiritual union with God. **Without baptism, there is no salvation.**”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover the Orthodox book *Catechism in the Home* misinterprets Mark 16:16 in stating,

“*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” And “when He was teaching Nicodemus, Jesus answered, ‘*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*’ (John 3:5) Spiritual ‘Rebirth’ or ‘Baptism by water and the Spirit’ is the first sacred mystery of the Orthodox Church, that is, the holy sacrament of Baptism... The commandment of the Sacrament of Baptism—the baptism ‘by water and the Spirit’—is contained in the first gospel, the first sermon which the Savior heralded to mankind... Christ issued the command about this sacrament specifically, as we have already noted, to His disciples, who preached a new Divine doctrine to baptize people ‘of water and the Spirit’ in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit... According to our holy faith, the sacred mystery of Baptism cleanses the newly baptized person of the sin inherited from his parents and is spiritually reborn of God for eternal life... **Baptism is, therefore, the precondition for our salvation.**”<sup>2</sup>

The Orthodox Catechumen course also teaches,

“Eventually, when the faithful begin to baptize their children, they stopped teaching the catechumen to their children. As a result of this change, the church leaders invented a new system called ‘godparents’. Children [infants] are baptized on the basis of the faith of their godfather, who in the process of the sacred mystery of Baptism becomes a spiritual father to that child – a status spiritually conferred by God... **The mystery of Baptism is the most important ritual in the worldwide Church of Christ...** The name which the newly baptized child receives from his godfather during baptism is

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<sup>1</sup> Zhivan M. Marinkovic, *The Greatest Teacher* (Belgrade, 1996), 246. Author's emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism in the Home* (Orthodox Religion Reader: Belgrade, 1991), 26-27. Author's emphasis.

recorded in the ‘Records of People Born and Christened in the Church of Christ’ and ‘the Book of Eternal Life’, a book possessed by the eternal Lamb of God, who was slaughtered from the foundation of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Based on these quotations, we can see what Eastern Orthodoxy teaches about baptism:

1. Orthodoxy believes that baptism is a precondition for salvation. Without baptism, it is impossible to have salvation.
2. Orthodoxy considers baptism as a “mystery,” even “the first mystery” in “the first Gospel.”
3. Orthodoxy claims baptism cleanses a person from all sins committed both by himself and his ancestors.
4. Orthodoxy accepts the baptism of infants and small children who are baptized on the basis of the godfather’s faith, who then becomes the spiritual father of the child.
5. Orthodoxy claims the name of the child christened under the godfather to be entered in the “Book of Life” that the Lamb possesses in heaven.
6. Orthodoxy considers the name of the baptized one is recorded in the annals of “Those Born and Christened in the Church of Christ.”

It is essential that we understand that Orthodox teaching on baptism is radically different from and even distorts the clear meaning God’s written Word. Baptism is not a precondition for salvation, nor is it a “holy mystery” that cleanses one of ancestral sin. Infant baptism on the basis of “faith of the godfather” is more than merely unbiblical. Writing the name christened to the baptized one by the godfather in the “Book of Life” simply does not exist in the Bible. Neither does the Orthodox Church’s “Book of Those Born and Christened in the Church of Christ” have any validity.

All that the Orthodox Church teaches on this issue derives from the influence of the “Church Fathers” of centuries later than God’s Word. Their teachings have nothing in common with Christ and the apostolic doctrine. This is easy to demonstrate. In order to defend their position that baptism is a condition for salvation, Orthodox theologians cite as their only proof Mark 16:16, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” When we study the text however we clearly see that faith is the key of saving grace, and unbelief is the chief damning sin. Faith is what is necessary for salvation and baptism is an ordinance that follows faith and simply testifies to it. Proof of this is found in the fact of the omission in the second half of the verse: it is not “he that is not baptized shall be damned,”

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 32. “Catechumen” – a course for adults that prepared them for baptism by teaching them the basic truths of Christianity. (Author’s note)

but rather “*he that believeth not.*” Faith is so indispensable that though one is baptized yet believes not, he shall be damned. The sinner is condemned because of his sin nature and his personal sin. God’s divine justice is upon him; nothing can propitiate God’s justice but saving faith in Christ. This faith, by God’s grace, instantly brings God’s act of justification.

Because there is no support for Orthodoxy’s theology in the Holy Scriptures, the Orthodox Church resorts to distorting the Scriptures and imposing an interpretation that is not appropriate with the context. As a result, Eastern Orthodoxy does not teach people biblical salvation. The New Testament defines baptism as an ordinance that Jesus Christ commands all people to receive who have put their faith in Him as Savior. It becomes perfectly clear that this has been the Apostolic teaching and practice for all true believers in the history of Christianity.

### **The Meaning of Baptism in the Church of the First Century**

The Orthodox theologian Marinkovic writes,

**“Faith is the gift of God and acquired during baptism.** Faith is a gift of God and is a sort of divine seed which the Holy Spirit sows in the soul of a person during baptism.”<sup>4</sup>

This quotation reveals to us the Orthodox belief that a person receives faith at the time of his baptism. Orthodoxy concludes that a person becomes a Christian only through receiving the mystery of baptism. Orthodox doctrine claims that before baptism a person hates God. However, after the Orthodox Church administers the rite of baptism, it converts this God-hating person in some mysterious way into a faithful believer. Such teaching clearly demonstrates that Orthodoxy<sup>5</sup> strays from the “right doctrine” of God’s Word. Let us examine the response of the New Testament to the quotation from Marinkovic.

The Scriptures clearly state: “*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...*”<sup>6</sup> “*So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”<sup>7</sup> Jesus Christ and the apostles taught about baptism in a way completely opposed to that which Eastern Orthodoxy teaches. After His resurrection, the Lord commanded the disciples to go into the whole world, to preach the gospel of salvation through faith, and to teach all people with the purpose of making them His disciples. Only when people had faith in Christ would the apostles follow by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Lord Himself had instructed them, “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Marinkovic, *The Greatest Teacher*, 10. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>5</sup> Translator’s note: the meaning of the Greek roots of “Orthodoxy” mean “right praise”, which also can be translated “right thinking” or “right doctrine”.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:17 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:17

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

Water baptism is supposed to be an external sign of justification by faith and a bring to an end the old sinful way of life. It is similar to the external sign of circumcision in the Old Testament, which served as a sign of the “circumcision of the heart,” that is, a rejection of sin. The New Testament emphasizes the fact that God did not save nor accept Abraham nor the Israelites in the Old Testament based on their external physical circumcision. Instead, God saved them on the basis of His grace, which produced a sincere desire to serve Him. In fact, physical circumcision could only serve as a visible external sign of their sincere faith and readiness to obey the Lord’s will. As the Scripture states, *“Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.”*<sup>9</sup>

The Apostle Paul testifies that at the time of sincere faith and spiritual birth of the believer, God does not cleanse a person from sin by physical circumcision, but rather by God giving that person a heart that rejects his prior sinful lifestyle and having a desire to fulfill His will.<sup>10</sup> As the Apostle states, *“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”*<sup>11</sup>

Unlike Orthodox priests who claim salvation comes through religious rites, the Apostles taught the doctrines of justification and salvation through faith in Christ as taught through the Bible. The apostles taught that faith comes from hearing the preaching of God’s Word.<sup>12</sup> Consistent with this teaching, the apostle Paul was able to declare that the Lord did not send him to baptize, but rather to preach the gospel.<sup>13</sup> Nowhere in his letters did Paul leave even the slightest idea that water baptism could lead to anyone’s salvation. On the contrary, Paul always emphasized the importance of receiving the message of the gospel by faith, the Good News of Jesus’ sacrificial suffering, and His resurrection from the dead. Paul said, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”*<sup>14</sup> *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with*

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 4:9-12 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:13 says, *“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”*

<sup>11</sup> Colossians 2:11-12 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> See Romans 10:17

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:17.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 1:16 Author’s emphasis.

*the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”<sup>15</sup>*

Paul clearly recognized the condition for giving a person baptism was that person’s own personal salvation, which was acquired solely through that person’s conscious faith. Unlike Orthodox leaders, Paul certainly would never have wasted his time baptizing faithless pagans.

### **Examples of Baptisms Performed by the Apostles**

We can observe in the following examples that the apostles always baptized people only after they preached to them the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ the Savior. They baptized only those people who received saving faith, that is, those who moved from unbelief to faith in Christ. As the apostle Peter proclaimed, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”<sup>16</sup>* *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them... But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”<sup>17</sup>* *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”<sup>18</sup>* *“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word... Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”<sup>19</sup>*

These Scriptures show us how the apostles baptized. The apostles preached to unbelievers the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ. A listener responds in faith to the salvation message of the Gospel. The new believers received baptism in water based upon their testimony of their adoption of faith in the Savior Jesus Christ and of their repentance. The apostolic practice of baptism demonstrates that they did not believe in the necessity of baptism for salvation. However, we also see the obligation for every believer who dedicates himself to Christ by faith

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<sup>15</sup> Romans 10:9-11 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 2:38, 41 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 8:4-5, 12 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 8:35-38 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 10:43-48 Author’s emphasis.

to be baptized soon afterward. This is in accordance with the Lord's commandment: "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*" When we understand exactly what the Lord Christ taught on the subject, we see that every believer ought to be baptized soon after he believes in Jesus. In other words, Christ stated that people who truly believe would receive salvation. As an obedient sign of their faith, they logically will seek baptism to testify to their faith.<sup>20</sup>

### **Conversely Orthodox Leaders Teach That Water Baptism Brings about Spiritual Rebirth**

We quote from the Orthodox book *Catechism in the Home* their misinterpretation of Scripture,

"When He was teaching Nicodemus, Jesus answered, *'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'*"<sup>21</sup>

Here we see a fundamental belief of Orthodoxy that is closely related to their understanding of the necessity of baptism for salvation. The quotation above comes from a book blessed by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch, Pavle. It shows that Orthodoxy misinterprets the biblical text from the Gospel of John. If the Orthodox teaching on the necessity of baptism to be saved were correct, then the actual words of Christ ought to correspond perfectly with Orthodox teaching. In fact, Orthodoxy misquotes and takes Christ's words out of context. Here is the context: "*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"<sup>22</sup>*

What we first notice about the God-inspired text is that Christ the Lord never uses the terms "baptismal regeneration by water and the Spirit." He does mention the word "birth," but that

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<sup>20</sup> One needs to clearly understand that the term "baptism" in the Bible has a wide range of meanings not limited to water baptism. Other meanings include the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (see Acts. 1:5, 11:15-16, 1 Corinthians 12:13) and "baptism of fire", e.g., eternal punishment by burning the souls of the unrepentant in the eternal Lake of Fire (see Matthew 3:11-12). Jesus calls His suffering on the cross a "baptism" (see Luke 12:50) and uses the same term with regard to the suffering of the apostles (Mark 10:38-39). Thus, it is possible that, in accordance with the entire biblical context of the message of eternal salvation, the Lord Christ in stating Mark 16:16 defines "baptism" not as water baptism, but rather the "baptism of the Holy Spirit". This would certainly support His overall teaching on salvation, which the apostles then preached.

<sup>21</sup> *Catechism in the Home*, 26. Author's emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> John 3:1-10 Author's emphasis.

does not equate to “baptism” as we have seen earlier. It is inexcusable to insert words into the mouth of the Lord Jesus that He never spoke nor thought. In this passage from John, Christ speaks of the need for God to render a miraculous “intervention” with every sinner who accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. The Lord calls this act of intervention “the birth from above” or “the birth from the Spirit.”

At the beginning of his gospel, when he still has not begun to describe specific events from Christ’s life, the apostle, John, summarizes the implications of Christ’s first coming to be with humankind by saying: *“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*<sup>23</sup>

Many Jewish people did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ even though they personally saw Him. However, a number of pagans heard about Him through the preaching of the Apostles and accepted Christ by faith. God gave them the power to become His children. The first category consists of Jewish people, regardless of whether they believed Christ or not, who were born only in the natural way from earthly parents. However, those who believed Jesus, be they Jew or Gentile, were born in the spiritual way by a second birth from God Himself.

### **The Nature of Spiritual Birth**

After Nicodemus expressed his astonishment and misunderstanding of spiritual birth, Jesus asked him, *“You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things?”* This Pharisee who knew the Scriptures of the Old Testament ought to have understood the truth that Jesus spoke. Yet, it is obvious that this was not the case. Regardless of Nicodemus’s ignorance of one of the most important spiritual messages from Jesus, he should have known that the “new spiritual birth from God” was written in several clear places in the books of the Old Testament. The clearest text that speaks about this “new spiritual birth” is found in the book of the prophet Ezekiel that was written five hundred years before Christ, *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”*<sup>24</sup>

This text says exactly what we learned in the study of the life of Abraham and his justification by faith. The Lord makes these promises to those who listen to the prophecy in Ezekiel:

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<sup>23</sup> John 1:9-13 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Ezekiel 36:25-7 Author’s emphasis.

The Lord will cleanse them by “bathing” them in pure water. The Lord will regenerate them by providing them a new heart and spirit. The Lord will make their hearts a sanctuary (“temple”) for His Spirit. The Lord will move them to follow His laws and decrees. The birth of God “from water and the Spirit” includes each of these promises. After a person puts his faith in Christ and is “born from above,” he receives a new nature that avoids sinful living and seeks to please God on a daily basis. As the New Testament states, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*<sup>25</sup> *“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”*<sup>26</sup> The new birth also makes the believer a temple of the Holy Spirit. As the Lord promised, *“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”*<sup>27</sup> And as the apostle asked, *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”*<sup>28</sup>

The truth of God’s Word contradicts the Orthodox statement that “the idea of the second birth as a religious experience, independent of water baptism, is a recent invention and has no biblical basis.”<sup>29</sup>

The new birth from God establishes fellowship with the Lord on the basis of sincere and firm belief. This fellowship with God could never be founded upon the absolution of ancestral sin or the spiritual deadness of the Orthodox teaching of baptism. Orthodoxy teaches.

“Orthodox baptism demonstrates the union of men with Christ and spiritual rebirth.”<sup>30</sup>

Even personal experience gives a very easy basis to refute this claim. One only needs to look at the lives of many baptized people in Orthodox churches (and in many other churches, for that matter) around the world. Such “baptized” church members are blasphemers, adulterers, liars, disobedient to parents, drunks, and transgressors with other sins, among such people who are pronounced “born again and united with Christ” by Orthodoxy. This contradiction shows us clearly that they were not “born again” nor “united with Christ,” despite the claims of Orthodox theology that they were spiritually regenerated. It would be utter blasphemy to even imagine, let alone declare as church dogma, that anyone who curses God (including the great majority of baptized Serbs) could ever be accepted by God as His child and united with Christ. Just as Jesus spoke to the religious Jews of His earthly ministry on earth, so He speaks to professing but

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17

<sup>26</sup> 1 John 3:9 John here is not referring to occasional sinning that happens in every believer’s life and which the true believer will regret. Rather, he refers to the conscious and deliberate disobedience of God’s revealed will. See James 3:2.

<sup>27</sup> John 14:16-17 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16

<sup>29</sup> *What Every Orthodox Christian Believes* (The Lamp), 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

unregenerate church members today: “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*”<sup>31</sup>

### **Orthodoxy Incorrectly Teaches that ‘The Godfather’ is a Spiritual Parent of a Newly Baptized Person**

From an Orthodox work earlier cited, we learned that children are baptized in the Orthodox Church based upon the faith of their godfathers, adults who becomes their spiritual parents.<sup>32</sup> The spiritual father of a little child gives “birth” to his godson “for God and eternal life.” Orthodoxy emphasizes the notion that such spiritual connection between the godfather and godchild is vital and almost as thick as blood.<sup>33</sup> What does God’s Word say about godfathers? Nothing!

The New Testament states nothing about the Orthodox system of godparents, e.g. the spiritual father of the baptized child. In fact, the Bible permits baptism only for those persons who believe in Christ the Savior. Small children and babies are excluded from the list of those who may be baptized, because they cannot take responsibility, nor can they consciously accept the Christian faith. The Holy Scriptures do not contain one single example of baptizing infants and small children, although it does not exclude the possibility that older children (perhaps around seven years old) could be baptized. Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic asserts the following:

“During the time of the holy Apostles, **anyone who sincerely believed in Christ** and thus entered into His kingdom, His church, was **baptized without any additional preparation**, apart from the fact that they heard strong preaching... Certainly, children were baptized, because we know that Peter baptized the Roman officer Cornelius in Caesarea along with his whole house, as Paul baptized the jailer of Philippi along with his whole house and Stephanas in Corinth with his whole house. Thus, as the Bible states people were baptized with their whole house, so that must include children as well.”<sup>34</sup>

Although Eusebius Popovic wanted to justify the Orthodox code of baptizing young children and infants, even he admitted that the apostles baptized only those people who believed with sincere hearts. The evangelist, Luke, confirms this point for us in Acts when he stresses that Peter baptized Cornelius and those in his house who **heard** his message and **put their faith in Christ** (which certainly could include children old enough to understand, but definitely not little children and infants who were too young to hear and believe). “*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word... For they heard them speak with*

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew 7:21-23 Translator’s emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> *Catechism in the Home*, 30-31

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>34</sup> *A General History of the Church*, Vol. 1, 430. Author’s emphasis.

tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”<sup>35</sup> “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”<sup>36</sup>

However, the very text that *Catechism in the Home* cites in support of the baptism of babies and the system of godparents comes only from times much later than Christ’s Apostles. Data from church history tells us that, for example, a church father from the second century, Tertullian of Carthage (160-220 A.D.), an opponent of baptizing young children, taught that this practice was introduced very slowly under the auspices of the church. In terms of baptizing infants, he advised and taught the following:

“According to circumstance and disposition and even age of the individual person, it may be better to delay Baptism; and especially so in the case of little children. Why, indeed, is it necessary - if it be not a case of necessity - that the sponsors be thrust into danger, when they themselves may fail to fulfill their promises by reason of death, or when they may be disappointed by the growth of an evil disposition? Indeed the Lord says, “*Do not forbid them to come to me*” [Matthew 19:14; Luke 18:16]. So as some grow up, some will learn, and some will become Christians when they can know Christ.”<sup>37</sup>

Eusebius Popovic confirmed the historical record that church authorities in the second half of the second century, and early part of the third century, condemned infant baptism, in contrast with later church leaders who felt that children should still be baptized, and who believed that even the earlier apostles practiced it.

“The post apostolic era of Tertullian (202 – 240 A.D.) opposed infant baptism, but Origen (d. 254 A.D.) defended the practice of baptizing children because of his interpretation of the Apostles.”<sup>38</sup> Various church fathers held different views on this important issue. Some of them decided to completely abandon the Bible’s apostolic teaching of believer’s baptism. Nevertheless, until the fifth century, many official church circles held to the biblical teaching on baptism. For several centuries after the time of Christ and his first disciples, many church fathers adhered to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. They adhered to Tertullian’s instructions to baptize children only when they were capable of understanding what they were taught about Christ. Children could receive baptism only when by their own conscious faith they could accept

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<sup>35</sup> Acts 10:44, 46-47 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 16:31-34 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> Tertullian, *Treatise on Baptism*, (c. 200-206 A.D.), 18, 4, cited in Simo Ralevic, *Biblical Baptism*, (House of Prayer: Pech, unknown date), 20. Author’s emphasis. See also <http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/a110.htm> .

<sup>38</sup> *A General History of the Church*, Vol. 1, 430.

Jesus as their personal Savior and receive conversion into true followers of the Lord. Thus ‘*A General History of the Church*’ states,

“Both the East and the West held to the **custom that the children of Christian parents were baptized only after these children grew up and confessed the faith themselves as adults later in life.** The custom of infant baptism arose in the third century in North Africa and was vigorously defended by Cyprian. It eventually spread to other parts of the church by the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. **Other church teachers fiercely opposed infant baptism, but they were finally suppressed.**”<sup>39</sup>

From just the above text we see clearly that the church fathers in later centuries managed to suppress the practice previously accepted by the church of baptizing believing children. Instead, these “church fathers” sought to introduce another custom alien to the Bible: the practice of baptizing young children based on the faith of another older person, an adult man (godfather), and then in addition, to even call him his “spiritual father.” Indeed, the very notion of “spiritual father” is unknown in biblical terminology in the way that Orthodox theology defines it. Specifically, the Lord said: “*And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.*”<sup>40</sup> Of course, the Lord’s commandment does not forbid calling our male parent “father.” Rather, His command refers to the fact that God, not man, is the only spiritual father of true Christians.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 649 Author’s emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 23:9

<sup>41</sup> Titles such as Father, Patriarch, and Pope translate as "father." The apostle Paul, however, in several places mentions himself as "father" in the Gospel who gave "birth" to some of the faithful - but that term is used only as a picture of the person through whom some come to salvation through faith (see 1 Cor. 4:14 -15; Gal. 4:19; Phil. 1:10). Paul and the other apostles were never called "spiritual fathers" by anyone, and especially not in the sense of “godfathers” as is the case in Orthodoxy.