

SOME BIBLE HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR BAPTISM

Cornelius

(From: *To the Parents of My Grandchildren*)
(Slightly Revised)

We have looked at many households in the Bible, and now come to a remarkable *series of households* in the New Testament, all, or nearly all, of which are Gentile, evidently recorded by the Holy Spirit for a special purpose. The first we meet is, as far as I know, that of Cornelius. He feared God *with all his house*. (Acts 10.2). He was right in seeing that his whole household followed him in his fear of God, and God takes special note of it. When Peter recounts his visit with Cornelius to the saints at Jerusalem, he says that the angel told Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter, "who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and *all thy house* shall be saved." (Acts 11.14). We shall meet with almost exactly these same words in pondering another "house", so that it would seem to suggest that these very words, which include the house, are the Holy Spirit's own special message to

those who truly desire to be saved. We need not now be concerned with who composed Cornelius' household, but we must note the word is the same as of old: "Thou and thy house." (Gen. 7.1).

Lydia

The next household we meet is that of Lydia "a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, *and her household*, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there." (Acts 16.14, 15). The Lord opened the heart of Lydia and she opened her house. It is all *individual*. Her own personal salvation was unquestionable, and so she was baptised. But what about her household? Were the members of it saved? Were there children in it or not? On all this the Scripture is absolutely silent: and it is not silent for the purpose of giving us the opportunity to speculate about these matters. The Spirit of God has another purpose in view

in the way He records these various households. So the important thing for us is to note what the Scripture says, and not add our own thoughts: and the Scripture records that Lydia's household was baptized, without any mention whatever of faith, real or otherwise, on their part. The narrative is complete. The Spirit has told us all He wished us to know, and we dare not add to it by reasoning or surmising. As the Scripture records it, Lydia's whole household was baptized on the ground of her faith.

It is very sad that these households which have been specially recorded for the instruction, comfort, and encouragement of us Gentile believers, have with very many been turned into a subject for vain speculation and dispute. How much better were we to come to the Scriptures to humbly seek to hear what they would teach us, instead of trying to force into them our own views and ideas. Let us, then, seek grace and humility to lay aside our own opinions, and to hear only what the Word says. It is no new thing in the Scriptures to see the *household* brought into a place of *external blessing*, on the

ground of the individual faith and responsibility of its head. We noted this at some length in the case of Rahab, and might have spoken of the same thing in connection with other households.

Previous to Noah, *individual* relationship and responsibility, as in Abel, Enoch, and others was the principle that God recognized, and on which He acted. But with Noah came a new development in God's dealings with man. Responsible *government* was introduced, and God commanded: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." (Gen. 9.6). This was something new in God's order; and with the introduction of government, God also disclosed household relationship with its corresponding responsibility, attached to its head. "Come thou and all thy house into the ark, for *thee* have I seen righteous before Me in this generation." (Gen. 7.1). No mention is made of the righteousness or faith of the household, but the whole house entered the ark on the ground of that of its head: and so even Ham, who afterwards proved to be so evil, was brought into a place of external blessing

on the ground of his father's righteousness and faith. "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark to the saving of his house: . . and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." (Heb. 11.7). Note, although Noah's house received an "External Saving", Noah alone is said to have become "heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Many other instances of this principle appear in the Old Testament. All the men of Abraham's house were circumcised on the ground of Abraham's faith. (Gen. 17.27, 27). We find Abraham's whole household again linked with him, in Gen. 18.19. * * * Note that the Lord was ready to save all of Lot's household. The angels said to him: "Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city bring them out of this place." That son in law was probably a Sodomite, yet for Lot's sake, the Lord would have saved him, had he been willing to be saved. Gen. 19. * * * Potiphar's whole house was blessed for Joseph's sake. And Joseph was his slave. Gen. 32.5. * * * We find the same principle when Pharaoh

wished to keep the little ones in Egypt. The grand reply is: "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go . . . there shall not an hoof be left behind." Ex. 10.9, 26. This beautifully illustrates God's grand principle that the whole household, and all that he has, is included with the head of that household. * * * We find the same thing in the Passover: "In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to *the house* of their fathers, lamb *for an house*." Ex. 12.3. * * * The Spirit of God takes care to point out to us in the New Testament, that when Israel crossed the Red Sea, *all* were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (i Cor. 10.1, 2). The Scripture tells us there were six hundred thousand men, "beside children", Ex. 12.37. Most of these men would be heads of households, and each brought his whole household with him out of Egypt. There were, doubtless, hundreds of thousands of infants and children, all of whom were baptized with their fathers "unto Moses." By this baptism externally they "all" left

the dominion of Pharoah, and "all" came under the authority of Moses, men and women, infants and children, alike. * * * Aaron's bullock for the sin offering was "for himself, and for his house." * * * At the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the households of Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up with them, and these households included little ones. Num. 16.27, 32, 33; Deut. 11.6. * * * The Hebrew servant would not go out free, "because he loveth thee and thine house." Deut. 15.16. * * * "Thou and thy household" were to eat the firstling males of the herd or of the flock. Deut. 15.20. * * * The same was true of the basket of firstfruits in Deut. 26.11. * * * We have noted Rahab, a Gentile, in Josh. 2.12, 18; 6.23-25. Here we find that her whole household, including the widest possible circle, were saved on the ground of her faith alone. * * * We find another Gentile in Judges 1.25, who brought blessing and safety to "all his family" by his one act of faith. * * * Obed-edom the Gittite was another Gentile for whom God acted according to this same truth: "The Lord blessed Obed-

edom, and all his household." ii Sam. 6.11, 12. * * * Ittai the Gittite (another Gentile from Gath) well understood God's order in this matter: "David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and *all the little ones* that were with him." ii Sam. 15.22. They passed over to share their king's rejection, along with their father. * * * When Israel was in great fear in the days of Jehoshaphat "all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children." ii Chron. 20.13. * * * In Nehemiah's day "they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced." Neh. 12:43. * * * We might continue, but I fear I have already wearied you; but I trust that this will make clear that from Noah's day onward, God's great principle was: "Thou and thy house."

The households of Cornelius and Lydia follow on in this remarkable line of *households* that we find all through the Old Testament. Great efforts have been made to prove that these New Testament households had no children, or that all were of

an age to believe, and had done so. To raise such questions when the Holy Spirit deliberately and intentionally is totally silent as to them, is merely to show that he who raises them has entirely missed the object of the Spirit of God. To the one well acquainted with the Old Testament, the term "household" should have become thoroughly familiar, and what it implied should have been well understood. It is almost what we might call "a technical term." The meaning the Spirit of God has in using it, is to be found in the use He has made of it in earlier Scriptures: and we have seen that it means exactly what it says: all in the house. This might, or might not, include infants, children, or servants; (a "servant that is bought for money" (Ex. 12.44) was in quite a different position to a "hired servant" today) and God did not upbraid Rahab when she stretched the meaning to include parents and brothers and sisters and their families. I suppose it is: According to your faith, so be it unto you. Some have pressed that we never find infants or children baptized in the Bible, so we may not include these in

the households we are now considering: but we have already seen that some half million or more households, including untold numbers of infants and children, were baptized, as pointed out in First Corinthians. If we are to understand aright these Scriptures we are now looking at, we must accept these *households* in the way in which the Spirit uses this word, or its representative, as family, little ones, etc., in the earlier portions of the Word: and we must receive these Scriptures as they stand without adding to them.

The Philippian Jailer

But we must look further at the households that the Spirit is bringing before us. After Lydia, in the same chapter, verses 25 to 34, we find the household of the jailer at Philippi. Notice the jailer's question, and the answer: "What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house.*" Reader, this is for us also. Accept it, Believe it, Rejoice in it, and thank God for His grace that has

given us such a promise for our households. Notice that it is almost the same word as to Cornelius by the angel: but notice also that it does not say: "Believe on Jesus and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." No doubt every one who truly believes on Jesus will be saved: but the promise "and thy house" is for one who believes on the *Lord Jesus Christ*. This involves bowing to His Lordship, and seeking by his grace to keep His word, and put Him first in our lives.

The "house" being included in the head of it, Paul and Silas spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And the account continues: "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." (Acts 16.33, 34). One would suppose from this that all the jailor's house believed when Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to them: but the Greek New Testament, in the words uttered by the Holy Spirit, does not say this. The

Revised Version renders it: "He rejoiced greatly with all his house, having believed in God." The New Translation by Mr. Darby has "he laid the table for them, and rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God." The Greek word "having believed" is nominative, singular, masculine, and can refer only to the jailor. We have seen a very similar example of the rejoicing in the case of the wives and the children in Nehemiah's day: and some of these "children" were almost surely too little to understand the cause of the joy, yet they rejoiced in the joy of their parents. Again we see that the Scripture is totally silent as to who composed the household, and as to their spiritual condition. The faith, conversion and baptism of the jailor are unquestionable, but the verbs *rejoiced* and *believing* are both in the singular, and apply to the jailor alone: though the household rejoiced with him, or "as a household", or, "householdly", if we could use such a term. Do not think it is an accident that the Spirit of God is silent in these cases as to the faith of the households, or who composed them. This silence is intentional, to bring home to us

Gentiles, that God's great principle of external blessing for the household on the ground of the faith of its head, also applies to us.

The people of Israel well understood this great principle, for a Hebrew child was circumcised the eighth day, when a tiny infant: and so brought *outwardly* into "the commonwealth of Israel:" but would this principle apply to the Gentiles, under Grace? These households are the answer.

Crispus

The next household brought before us is that of Crispus. "Crispus, the chief ruler of the Synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house." (Acts 18.8). Here we have the faith of the whole household recorded, in contrast to the silence regarding those we have already looked at. But it is striking to observe that the Scripture says nothing about the baptism of the household of Crispus, though Paul tells us that he baptized Crispus, but says nothing of his household. (i Cor. 1.14). Please notice care-

fully that the households *not* spoken of as believing, were baptized: while another which did believe, is *not* mentioned as being baptized. Why is this? For surely the Scripture is absolutely perfect in what it relates, and what it withholds. Nobody would question the baptism of the household of Crispus: they all believed, and so of course were all baptized, even though the Scripture does not tell us so. But it *might* be questioned whether a household, in the absence of faith, had a right to be baptized. We believe that this shows forth the excellence and perfection of the Holy Scriptures in a way that speculations and surmisings never can.

Stephanas

In i Cor. 1.14 to 16, we read of still another household: that of Stephanas. "I baptized also the household of Stephanas." Nothing more is told us of this household until we come to i Cor. 16.15, when we read: "Ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." It might seem

from this latter Scripture that those in the household of Stephanas were old enough to minister to, or, serve the saints, and so had passed the age of infants or children: but the word used in Greek for the household of Stephanas in the first chapter is a wider word, than that used of it in the 16th chapter. This would intimate that all the house of Stephanas was baptized, but only part, a narrower circle, perhaps excluding little children, addicted themselves to the service of the saints. So once again the Scripture is entirely silent as to who composed the household of Stephanas, and silent as to their spiritual condition: Yet Paul himself baptized it. If we are wise we will learn from these silences, as well as from what is revealed to us.

There was nothing further from my thoughts when I began than to touch on the vexed question of the baptism of our children; but in meditating on Scripture households, it seemed hardly upright to either pass over this remarkable series of households in the New Testament, or to refrain from seeking to point out what appears to the writer to be the evident

intention of the Holy Spirit in recording them in this particular manner for us. I know nothing of "Infant Baptism," or "New Birth by Baptism," in the Scriptures; but I do not believe any true Christian who believes the Scriptures can deny that the baptism of households is plainly taught in the Word of God. They may not like it. They may not believe in it. They may refuse to bow to it, as so many around us refuse to *bow* to clear truths in the Scriptures that they cannot *deny*. But I do not believe that any honest Christian can say that the baptism of households, entirely apart from any mention of their faith, is not plainly taught in the Word of God. Oh, May God give us grace not only to hear His Word, but also to do it. See Matt. 7.24.

(Parts of the preceding are taken from "The Two Trees of Paradise;" and from "Christian Baptism"; both by Walter Scott.)

(From: "To The Parents of My Grandchildren")