



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.4.5 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

### The Faith of Infants and Small Children

Some Protestant churches teach that the children of believing parents are believers by birth. Others teach that children are not responsible for any sins until they reach the age of accountability. But the Bible does not teach such doctrines. Jesus said to Nicodemus: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh... You must be born again”** (John 3:6-7). The Bible says nothing about an age of accountability, rather it says that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23) and that the purpose of God’s Law is **“that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”** (Romans 3:19). David confessed: **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”** (Psalm 51:5).

The fact is that infants and small children also need faith in Jesus Christ to be saved. God creates such faith through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. We also know that it is God’s will to save everyone, especially also the little children, for Jesus said: **“It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish”** (Matthew 18:14) .

But is it really possible for infants and small children to believe in Jesus? Many think that it is not possible to believe in Jesus without being able to understand that faith and verbalize it by a confession. But Jesus did not say that infant faith is impossible. Rather, He said: **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”** (Matthew 18:6). When the Jewish priests and scribes objected to the praises given to Jesus by the little children on Palm Sunday, Jesus replied by quoting Psalm 8:2: **“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise”** (Matthew 21:16).

When Jesus’ own disciples tried to prevent parents from bringing their little children and **“infants”** (Luke 18:15) to Jesus for His blessing, Jesus was not pleased with His disciples and said to them: **“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as (like) a little child will by no means enter it”** (Mark 10:14-15).

It is through Gospel and Sacrament that God creates the faith in Jesus Christ that is necessary for salvation. The apostle Paul states this clearly when he calls baptism **“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”** and says that through that washing **“He saved us”** (Titus 3:5). One could translate this passage’s description of baptism as “the Holy Spirit’s washing of regeneration and renewing.” Thus, baptism is God’s way of creating faith in Christ in little children, for regeneration means to be born again. This agrees with Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** A spiritual rebirth is necessary, for only **“that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”** (John 3:5-6)

We will be discussing the means of grace more in the next chapter. In particular, we will look at the sacrament of baptism and what God says about baptism in His Word. For now, we simply want to teach and confess the truth that it is possible for infants and little children to believe in Christ, as it is also possible for the feeble-minded and mentally challenged to believe in Christ. Even adults continue to believe while they are sleeping, as do persons who are unconscious in a coma.

## Questions

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1. What is true of every infant that is born into this world?
2. How do we know that infants and children are also responsible before God for their sins?
3. Where does the Bible speak of the faith of little children and infants?
4. Why was Jesus displeased with His disciples when they prevented parents from bringing their children to Him for His blessing?
5. Why is baptism called a washing of regeneration?
6. What is the difference between being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit?
7. What religious groups in your locale practice infant baptism, and which groups object to infant baptism?