

“Do Babies Go to Hell?”

Do you believe that babies go to hell or not? Please support your answer with Scripture.

This is an issue that challenges or questions the justice of God. It is a legitimate question, and I must say at the outset we cannot give a total answer. But there are passages in the Bible which shed a great deal of light on the subject. I will try to address the ones that have come to my mind which I think bear directly or indirectly on your question of the innocence/accountability of children.

Generally speaking, we are asking the question, “What do children know and when do they know it? And the key issue here is one of comprehension of, or the understanding of the Gospel message. This is not only true for children, it is true for adults. When Philip saw the Ethiopian eunuch sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah 53, he was instructed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:29) to “Go up and join this chariot.” Philip asked him if he **understood** what he was reading. The eunuch replied, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides Me?” (v. 31). Acts 8:32-40 goes on to relate that Philip explained how this Eunuch could become a Christian. He responded and was baptized.

My point in beginning with this incident is because there can be no salvation without an understanding of the gospel message. We find Paul throughout the book of Acts reasoning, debating, contending with people so they might understand the message of salvation. And so children must be old enough to **understand** the gospel, which involves a comprehension of their own personal sin and guilt.

This brings the next question: *At what age would that be?* I am sorry that I cannot give an affirmative answer since the Scripture never pinpoints clearly the exact age when this occurs. The Talmud from ancient times designated age thirteen for boys (“Bar Mitzvah,”—cf. *Judaism*, Arthur Hertzberg, p. 100) and twelve for girls (“Bat Mizvah”). This was the time when Jewish boys and girls became responsible for themselves and were to observe all the rituals, feasts, etc., incumbent upon them as members of the Jewish community. It was also the time when the boys were allowed (called) to read the Torah as full members of the worshipping community.

The confirmation services for the young which are practiced in all Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and some Protestant churches are based on the earlier Jewish traditions above. All of them, including the Jewish community, have traditionally set the “age of accountability at about age twelve.

It is also interesting that Luke records the incident at the temple where a twelve-year-old Jesus lagged behind his family and was found (three days later!) in the temple “sitting amidst the teachers both listening to them and asking them questions. . . And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.” (Luke 2:46,47).

We can glean from other Old Testament passages additional insights:

1. I Samuel 1:22-18; 3:1-19: Hannah, married to Elkanah, was barren. She made a vow to the Lord that if He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord for lifelong service. God graciously did so, and Samuel was born. Hannah cared for him and told her husband she would not go up to the Tabernacle (at Shiloh) for the annual sacrifice (Day of Atonement) until she had weaned Samuel, saying, “*I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord and stay there forever.*” (1:22).

The weaning of Hebrew (and other ancient) children did not occur until two or three years, and

nursing may have extended beyond to perhaps age five. Therefore Samuel was a very young boy when he was dedicated to the service of the temple. Hannah says on this occasion, "For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. . . So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord. And she worshipped the Lord there." (1:27,28). We are also told in 2:11 that "the boy ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest." Verses 2:18-21 indicate that the boy was visited each year by his mother, at which time she would bring him a new, little robe. Several years are indicated in this passage, including the fact that Hannah had given birth to three more sons and two daughters. We can conclude, since Samuel was at least three or four years old when initially brought to the temple, he would at least be nine or ten, and could have been even older (a teenager) when he had his visitation and call from the Lord in I Samuel 3:1-21. The critical verse in this chapter is as follows: "Now Samuel **did not yet know the Lord**, nor had the word of the Lord yet been revealed to him." (v. 7).

So here again, Samuel could well have been around age twelve when this event occurred, an incident pointing out a demarcation in his life—of "not knowing" and then "knowing" the Lord.

2. Another passage which marks out this demarcation is found in Nehemiah 8:1-3. After Nehemiah and the Jews had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem they gathered together in worship to hear Ezra the Scribe read the Torah: "And the people gathered as one man, . . . and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of **men, women, and all who could listen with understanding**. And he read from it before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of **men and women, those who could understand**; and all the people were **attentive** to the book of the law. . . And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the **sense** so that they **understood** the reading (v.8). By implication, the younger children—those without understanding—were **not** present.

3. Another interesting "accountability" issue is found in the Torah which involves the numbering of the fighting men of Israel in the book of Numbers. We are told in Numbers 1 that Moses was instructed to "take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and their families. . . according to the number of names, every male, head by head **from twenty years and upward**, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel." (1:2,3). This passage informs us that there were *no teenagers* in Israel's army. This census was taken at the end of the entire year the Israelites spent at Mt. Sinai where they received the Law, and during which time they built the Tabernacle and organized themselves into a well-defined community. They were now to embark upon the conquest of Canaan. However, they were called upon to postpone that conquest because of their unbelief and disobedience at Kadesh Barnea. God sent them into the wilderness for forty years after their "Reconnaissance" of Canaan by the twelve spies ended in failure.

After this forty-year exile we read in Deuteronomy 2:14-16, "Now the time that it took for us to come from Kadesh-barnea to (here has been) thirty-eight years; until all the generation of the men of war perished from within the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them. Moreover the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from within the camp, until they all perished."

What is significant here is that those men who perished were those selected for the army forty years earlier whose ages ranged from twenty to age sixty. The Bible says that by thirty-eight years later, all of these men, the men of "unbelief," had now died off, leaving only the new generation which *would* be allowed to enter Canaan. This new "fighting force" would include that original group of males (from age 1 to 19 (which would now be ages 40 to 59) as well as all the males which had been born during the roughly forty years of Wilderness wanderings. So here again, there is an "age of accountability" factor taken into account by the Lord and His servant, Moses. There was no judgment upon this younger group of males. They were allowed to enter Canaan and participate in

the conquest of the Land.

There is another passage that touches on this later “age of accountability” from the life of Jehoiachin, II Kings 24:8: “Jehoiachin was **eighteen** years old when he became king. . .and he did **evil** in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.” So here we find an eighteen-year-old king who is viewed by the Lord as being accountable for the evil he had already done.

I put this section in, but I don’t personally believe that exempting the “under-twenty-year-olds” at the time of the Exodus is a likely precedent for an age of accountability. Furthermore, we find in the legal regulations of the Torah that a disobedient and unmanageable teenager was responsible for his actions, and could be stoned to death by the community! This could occur for cursing his parents, violence, drunkenness, adultery, and so forth. So, in my thinking, the ten to twelve year age would seem more likely for an age of understanding or accountability.

4. Another passage which bears upon our question comes from the life of David, and specifically the outcome of his sin with Bathsheba and the premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11 & 12). You will recall that David lusted after Bathsheba’s great beauty and committed adultery with her, after which she became pregnant (11:1-5). David gave instructions to have Uriah placed “in the fiercest battle and withdraw from him so that he may be struck down and die.” (11:15). After Uriah’s death, David brought Bathsheba to his house as his wife, and she bore him a son. (11:27) Nathan the prophet confronts David with his sin and says, “because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.: Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David, so that he was very sick.” (12:14,15).

The child lingered for seven days and then died. During this time, David prayed and fasted and laid on the ground. When the child died the servants were afraid to tell David, but he saw them whispering and they finally told him, “He is dead.” (12:19).

When David heard this, he got up, washed himself, changed his clothes, asked for food and ate. His servants were perplexed by this: while the child lived, David mourned. When the child died, David got up and ate food. They wondered why. David said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live. But now he has died; why should I fast.? Can I bring him back again? ***I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.***”(12:22,23)

David has a view of death and immortality which expresses itself in this incident involving the death of a child. David believes in the after life. In Psalm 23 he concludes by saying: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” So for David there was a place for the dead, including children—the house, or the dwelling place, of the Lord. David also speaks of this in Psalm 16:9,10 where he says, “For thou wilt not abandon (leave) my soul in Sheol (the grave); Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to see (experience) decay (corruption).” David believes in the resurrection of the body—for himself, and for the Messiah (the Holy One) (see also Acts 13:35). Job says something very similar: “And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is flayed (corrupted) Yet without my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another.”

The point of David’s perspective is that he believes that the child is still alive and in God’s presence, David anticipates that when *he* dies, he will join his little son in the house of the Lord: “I shall go to him.”

5. Finally, we have the teachings of Jesus Himself. In Matthew 19:13-15, our Lord says as the children we being hindered from coming near to Him, *“Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, and after laying His hands on them, He departed. . .”*

Christ has a special love for little children. Why He associates children with the Kingdom of Heaven is because it is the place of the innocent, the blameless. It would appear that Jesus sees children in this light. The whole trend of Scripture seems to teach that the innocents who are too young to sin and too young to accept Christ intelligently (*with understanding!*), are safe in the arms of a just and holy God.

We need never fear about God being unjust. He cannot be. His mercy and justice are from everlasting to everlasting. I therefore conclude, that there will be no children in hell. There will also be no retarded, or otherwise mentally-incapacitated individuals there, those who cannot fully comprehend and understand what Christ has accomplished on their behalf at Calvary.

In summary, I think we can conclude the following:

First, that there is some period of grace afforded the young before they have developed an understanding to fully comprehend the gospel message and its implications for their lives.

Second, there seems to be good scriptural support that all infants, like David’s little son, go immediately, in their innocence, into the arms of the Lord.

Third, that the likely range of such an age of “accountability ” may occur around the time of puberty.

Fourth, that we are not saying children younger than this “accountability age” commit no sin (as sinful tendencies and acts occur quite early in children), and because of their fallen nature, they do these things spontaneously, things which they have definitely NOT learned from their parents or their friends). What we are saying is that up to the point when they reach clear understanding, they do not come under the judgment of the Law.

I’m sure that much more could be gleaned from the scriptures on this, but these passages came to my mind. At least it’s a start at answering your question, D____. I hope this helps.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Yes Sir, that does help. Thanks very much. What you wrote is what I’ve long believed, without really knowing how to defend it biblically.

Now for a follow-up question which seems to spring quite logically from what you wrote: If God exempts from holding accountable for their sins those who are not old enough to have “understanding,” and those of any age who are incapable of having “understanding” (such as the mentally retarded), is it also possible, Scripturally speaking, that He exempts in some measure those who have never heard of Jesus at all—judging them perhaps by whatever standard He utilized for those before Christ (lived), both Jews and non-Jews, some of whom certainly gained eternal life, rather than automatically condemning them for not accepting the Savior of whom they never heard?

I would suggest you check the Probe web site and look for three articles which address this question: “What About the Person Who Never Heard of Jesus,” “Is Jesus the Only Savior?” and “Is There a Second Chance to Believe After Death?”

I would say in addition, to your remarks about Old Testament believers, that there were two kinds of people before Christ just as there are two kinds of people now: **believers** and **unbelievers**.

It is helpful for me to think of this in terms of a painting. As early as Genesis 3:15, immediately after the “Disobedience/Fall” God began to reveal His plan of redemption. He speaks there of the “Seed” of a Woman” who would one day **crush** the head of Satan and destroy his power and influence on the earth.

As we move through the Old Testament, God continues, with broad strokes at first, to sketch out the details of Who this Person would be. By the time we get to Malachi, a fairly accurate portrait of Messiah and His Mission has been provided. The New Testament is the fulfillment of that unfolding from the Old.

Jesus said, “Your Father Abraham **saw my day** (time, era) and rejoiced in it” (John 8:16). Now, what did He see (comprehend, understand)? Not the **whole** picture revealed in the New Testament, but enough information for him to have a basis (God’s promise of a Messiah) for his trust, his belief, at that time.

Noah is another example. There is nothing directly mentioned about the Messiah in the Noah narrative (except the fact that the Ark itself is a **type** of Christ—those inside the Ark were saved; those outside the Ark perished), the important principle is that God revealed some things to Noah and asked him to be obedient to them.

We cannot understand this Old Testament Salvation issue unless we see clearly what God was doing. What was He doing from Genesis 3:15 to the end of the Old Testament? He was progressively revealing more and more details about His promised Messiah. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “God spoke long ago to the fathers by the prophets and in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

It seems apparent that the Old Testament saints had *some* “light” and they were responsible to respond to it. The CROSS has always been the *basis* for our salvation. Those who came before it looked *forward* in time to when it *would* be fulfilled. Those of us who have lived *after* Jesus’s Day look back to that time when it *was* accomplished. This is the *basis* for our salvation. The *means* of our salvation is always *faith*, encompassing all who lived before and all who lived after the Cross who “believed God” and whatever revelatory information they had at that time. And the *results* of our faith are always expressed in being obedient to those things which God has revealed. I hope this information and the other articles I have recommended you to read will answer your above question.

Do Babies Go to Hell? #2

This is one of those items that, as you know, God has not revealed. Consider this: If we think they don’t, that is, that God takes them all to Heaven, then abortion and the killing of those before the so-called age of accountability would be a great way to have more babies go to Heaven. Consider, what percent of those that reach the so-called age of accountability get saved/born again. By aborting and killing the young children we could increase that to 100 percent. This would of course make abortion and murder good.

Thank you for this response to my remarks about the above topic.

First of all, I respectfully disagree with your first statement. It seems to me that, while we do not have a total answer to this question from the Scriptures, I enumerated several lines of thought pertaining to the question, one of which was a clear, biblical example recorded of a child who had died and went to heaven. So I don't think you could say "God has not revealed anything about this issue to us. We do have *some* information and insight from the Scriptures.

So I will restate my conviction that I do believe there are *not*—nor will there ever be—any children in hell.

Secondly, I don't follow your logic in your next statement. Given my view, any infant death—whether from abortion, accident, disease, assault or other causes—does not matter: *All* babies go to heaven. And so aborting children would *not* be a great way to have more babies go to Heaven, as you suggest, since all of them go to Heaven.

Thirdly, you have tacked on to this another issue which must be kept separate from the above. You say, I think, that we would be doing *some* persons (those who are not going to become Christians after they have reached the age of accountability when they are held responsible to God for their choices and behavior) a big "favor" by aborting them. I hope I am reading you right.

There are several things very wrong about what you propose: (a) I would assume that you believe, as I do, that the "termination of a pregnancy" (i.e., a euphemism for killing and destroying an unborn infant) is murder. This is a violation of the Sixth Commandment (Ex. 20:13). This commandment alone is in opposition to what you suggest. (b) Further, in order to carry out such a task, you would literally have to be God Himself, since you don't know which ones are the "fledgling" non-believers upon whom you are to perform your acts of "mercy." (c) But why stop there? Why not go ahead and do the same with the mentally-impaired? The comatose? The "*non compos mentis*" elderly? Would they not also qualify? Something is wrong with this picture.

Fourthly, you say that carrying out such an enterprise would "make abortion and murder good." This is actually very far from what I view as a Scriptural perspective. Paul asks, "Shall we sin (continue in sin) so that (we can see) grace abound? (Romans 6:1)" In other words, should we take advantage of God's forgiveness of sins through Christ and go on sinning so we can see His marvelous Grace go to work to cover it? Paul says, "God forbid." He elaborates on this later on: "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cleave to what is good (12:9)." Earlier Paul defends his actions against those who were criticizing him and his colleagues, "slanderosly reporting that we say, '*let us do evil that good may come.*' Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:8)." In Psalm 109:3-5 David's words could easily be applied to the unborn: "They have spoken against me. . . they have also surrounded me with words of hatred, And fought against me *without cause*. In return for my love (innocence) they act as my accusers;...Thus they have repaid me *evil for good*. ...and *hatred* for my love." In II Corinthians 13:7,8 Paul says, "Now we pray to God *that you do no wrong*...but that you may *do what is right*For we can do *nothing* against the *truth*, but only *for the truth*." In Proverbs 17:13 it says, "He who returns evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house." And "He who *justifies* the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an *abomination* to the Lord (vs. 15,16)." And Moses says, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you *life* and *death*, the blessing and the curse. So *choose life* in order that you may live, you and your seed, by loving the Lord your God, by *obeying* His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days (Deut. 30:19,20)." And finally, James says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does *not tempt anyone* [to do evil] (James 1:13)."

The principle is pretty clear: "**It is never right to do wrong in order to do right.**" "**It is never good to do evil in order to do good.**"

I hope this answers your question, _____ .

God's blessings,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Do Babies Go To Hell #3

First, I want to say that our family has been blessed by the ministry of Probe. I've caught up on my mail, and just read the answer to the questions "Do Babies Go to Hell?" There is a passage in Romans that always comes to mind in this regard. It is Romans 7:9.

I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

This is "the" verse that really spoke to me about the existence of an "age of accountability," whatever that age may be. Being a Jew, and a Pharisee at that, I'm sure Paul had a knowledge of the law on some level at an early age. But it wasn't until it "came" to him (he understood it?) that he was accountable, i.e. he "died" (came under condemnation which he knew was worthy of death).

Just though I'd pass this on. I might not have bothered to respond, not wanting to take time to look up the verse, but I just read Romans 7 this morning so it was "quite" fresh in my mind. And I can never read this without thinking of this point.

May the Lord continue to bless your ministry.

PraiSing Him,

Dear _____,

Thank you for your e-mail and comments on Romans 7:9. It really relates to this subject. I am glad you are benefiting from the Probe web site. Thank you for expressing your appreciation, which is a real encouragement to all the Probe Staff.

Jimmy Williams
Probe Ministries

Do Babies Go To Hell #4

I frequent your web site and have enjoyed it thoroughly. It has helped to shape me and has been a source of God's truth for me. For that I am grateful!! I don't think that once I have ever felt that you have been different than what God's truth says. Below I raise some questions about the recent article about babies' salvation. Please comment to help me understand how you feel. Thanks.

First of all, the Bible says that ". . .all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All we like

sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way. . .” “. . . there is none that doeth good, no not one.” These folks that believe that children won’t be held accountable for their sins, I believe, don’t understand the fallen nature of man and the righteous character of an all-Holy God.

Even David had a handle on this doctrine when he wrote in Psalm 51: “Behold, I was shaped in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

It’s important to note that the “all” and “everyone” listed above means all people, even babies, born and yet unborn. We are by nature sinful, which means we are spiritually dead and enemies of God. Spiritually-dead people (of any age) cannot make themselves spiritually alive any more than physically-dead people can make themselves physically alive.

Spiritually-dead babies are enemies of God and separated from Him and completely unable to change that situation. The nature of God is that He is totally just and righteous. The Bible says, “. . . I am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “I will by no means clear the guilty.” He had sworn a “thousand” times in Scripture to punish sin wherever He finds it. His justice demands that He do it. He cannot make any exceptions.

So. . .this is why Jesus came to earth to die on the cross. If babies were not going to be held accountable for their sins (and would automatically go to heaven when they die) as this fellow teaches, then Jesus wasn’t needed for them. This path would lead us to believe that Jesus came to die only for those who have reached that mystical “age of accountability” and understand their sinful condition and can make a decision regarding the gospel. It is true that as we mature and do become aware of our thoughts and behavior and choices that we will be held accountable for them. Those who assert that the age of accountability is when children become responsible before God, yet none of them seem to know when that age is. Wouldn’t it seem important to know that?

One more thing. By stating that we must reach this (unknown) age before we can understand and believe and thus be responsible for our salvation puts some of the credit for our being saved upon US, doesn’t it?

The business of enlightening souls and saving same belongs to the Holy spirit. Martin Luther stated, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in God or come to Him. . .” We are saved by God alone. “By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”

We are accountable for our sins from conception and can only be saved when the Holy Spirit gives us this faith and changes us from spiritually dead to spiritually alive. This is why we embrace Baptism. In I Peter 3:21, Peter states: “Therefore we conclude, that Baptism doth also save us, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

In Baptism, we are responding to a command of Christ’s and the Holy Spirit promises to save us through the water and the Word by this act. What do you think of this?

Thank you for your recent e-mail. I appreciate the fact that you have found benefit from the Probe Website. I am the fellow you refer to who is responsible for writing the e-mail, “Do Babies Go to Hell?”

In your first two paragraphs you mention the fact that from conception babies bear the stamp of sin. I have no problem with this as long as we understand what that means. And what it means is that babies are members of a fallen race (See my discussion on this in E-Mail #1). Sin is passed on genetically from the male. This was why the Virgin Birth was necessary and specifically why Jesus

was “without sin.” He is therefore the only exception to the general rule.

And I also agree with you that apart from the working of God, all humans are spiritually dead until they hear the Gospel, respond to it and are born again into the family of God.

You say that “spiritually-dead babies (born and unborn) are enemies of God, separated from Him, and are completely unable to change that situation.” And I agree with you on the basis of what I have just said above. But I want to ask you a question. Do you then believe that every embryo, every unborn fetus, and all toddlers, let’s say, from the beginning of time until now, are actually in hell? What if we add four and five-year olds? Them too? I don’t think so. But this is what you are asserting to be true.

I point you back to a review of my original discussion in E-Mail #1 about an alternative to your conclusion and one which has some (not exhaustive) support in the Scriptures. Specifically, I would ask you to focus on David’s experience with his newborn son (from Bathsheba) who became sick and died seven days after his birth (II Samuel 11 and 12). After the child has died, David says, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me (12:22,23).” Now here is a baby that had, as we all do, a sin nature, but *didn’t* go to Hell. In Psalm 23 we have a clear indication of where David felt he would be after death: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” And he anticipated that he would again see his little son.

In your next paragraph you make the assumption that those who have not reached the age of accountability have no need of a Savior. I don’t follow your logic. On the basis of your own premise that all in Adam are tainted with sin and are in need of a redeemer, I don’t understand why you would say His death would not apply to these young ones as well. You do admit that **“it is true that as we mature and do become aware of our thoughts and behavior and choices that we will be held accountable for them.”** That is exactly the point. The primary reason that Christian parents hesitate to explain the Gospel to very young children is because those parents want them to be old enough to fully UNDERSTAND what Jesus did for them.

This leads me on to answer your question about “pinning down” what/when that age might be. I don’t think we can arbitrarily pick an exact age for everyone. There are too many variables. But we do know this: there are FOUR components necessary for one to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We find them in Paul’s interchange with Lydia in Acts 16:14: “And a certain woman named Lydia. . .was (1) **listening**, and the (2) **Lord opened her heart to respond** to the (3) **things spoken** by (4) **Paul.**”

In Acts 9:27-39 we have the account of Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was reading Isaiah 53 out loud as he sat in his chariot. Philip ran up and asked him, “Do you **understand** what you are reading? The eunuch answered, “How could I, unless **someone guides** me?” You know the rest of the story. My point here is that even **adults** don’t become Christians until they, with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, come to **understand** the gospel and see it with the eyes of faith. Would it be any **less** important for children to have the same understanding?

We also find in the Scriptures times when God **overlooked** sin under certain circumstances as the redemptive work unfolded through time: “the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because of the **passing over** of the **sins** previously committed in the **forbearance** of God (Romans 3:24-25.” (See also Acts 17:30; Romans 5:13,14). You will also find other, similar elements in the first e-mail.

In your next paragraph you indicate you feel special credit is due those who come to a place of

accountability to God, and that their use of reason or comprehension somehow negates the work of the Spirit. I point you back to Lydia. NO ONE COMES TO CHRIST WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL. This involves *reason*. And part of that reasoning is to comprehend Romans 6:23—it is, as you mention, by *grace* and not of works, “lest *anyone* might boast.”

You conclude with some comments about baptism, and quote I Peter 3:21. I am not sure why you included this in the discussion, but let me comment: First of all, I am wondering if you are including believer baptism as *part* of the Gospel: that is, you believe one does not become a Christian when he *believes* the Gospel, but rather that you only accomplish when you are baptized. I am assuming that you are not here referring to infant baptism, which, incidentally, is used by some segments of Christendom to do something to *cover* these young ones until they come of an age when they *can* understand the Gospel. I do not personally believe that baptizing an infant with water, without an understanding of the Gospel, accomplishes *anything*. It isn't even mentioned in Scripture.

Further, Paul tells us clearly in Romans 1:16 that he is “not ashamed of the **gospel**, for **it** is the **power** of God **unto salvation for every one who believes.**” And so it is clear that the **Gospel** is the power of God unto Salvation, and *nothing else*. But we find in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Paul **clearly** distinguishes between the Gospel and Baptism: “For Christ did not send me to **baptize**, but to preach the **gospel.**” Evidently, Paul does not include baptism as part of the gospel, but rather saw it as the appropriate response of obedience following one's conversion. Even the verse you quote from Peter must be carefully read: Peter qualifies his statement about baptism by making sure he is not misunderstood. He appears to me to be saying that water will not wash away sin, but rather, in **obedience** to the command of Christ, the believer, in good conscience toward God, gives his answer, or his response, to the truth of the Gospel by submitting to baptism. Baptism is a public testimony of one's inner commitment to the Person and Work of Christ: “The word is near you, in your **mouth**, and in your **heart.**—That is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you **confess** with your **mouth** Jesus as Lord, and **believe** in your **heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be **saved**; for with the **heart** man **believes**, resulting in righteousness, and with the **mouth** he **confesses**, resulting in **salvation**.”

You asked me to comment on these issues and I have tried to do this as honestly as I can from my understanding of God's Word. You may not be comfortable with all of my responses, but I have given you my “best shot.”

May the Lord bless you and your family,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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