

St. Paul is the poster child for someone who had it all. He was a well-educated rabbi who was on the fast track for being a big shot at the temple. He was making a name for himself persecuting Christians thus pleasing both the Jews and the Romans and he gave it all up for Jesus.

Why would he do that?

Well it was not a choice he made. It was made for him. Yes, as much as our Bible Church brethren would love for it to be your choice to accept Jesus as your personal savior and invite him into the tabernacle of your heart, it simply does not work that way. Look at the account of what happened to St. Paul. He was doing his thing, breathing out murderous threats and suddenly a bright light cast him to the ground, blinded him and Jesus spoke from the light and told him to knock it off. Exactly what role did Paul play in his salvation? He did not turn his heart to Jesus. He did not intellectually understand that his way was wrong and choose to follow the right way. There was no intervention where several people prayed over him and laid hands on him. And he did not give a love-gift of \$19.95 for Ananias' new book, "Taking the Scales from Your Eyes." No, while St. Paul was still a murderous, rotten sinner, Jesus saved him. Jesus did it all.

It drives me to distraction when I hear people who have already been baptized are joining Bible Churches but they have to be "rebaptized." Excuse me? Why would one require a second baptism? Did God not get it

right the first time? That would be like Ananias telling Paul, well I know Jesus called you along the road but that's just not the way we do things so why don't you go read this self-help book and get into a small-group Bible study and then maybe you will be ready to commit your life to Jesus later. NO! Ananias baptized him for the first and only time and he immediately began proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is what the power of Baptism does!

What Ananias did is exactly what we do. We Baptize and immediately people who are Baptized are filled with the Holy Spirit so we begin giving them avenues in which to express their faith. That's why we encourage all of you with babies to be in worship every week. Do they make noise? Yes! They make the glorious noise of young believer's learning to worship their God. The nursery is not a place to park children because they cannot possible understand what is going on in here. Most of us don't understand what is going on in here either. Body and Blood entering us through bread and wine? God himself forgiving our sins through a pastor? The Holy Spirit washing anew over us as the waters of our Baptisms continue to flow over us? We don't understand how any of that works.

I know how it is though. I raised kids too and there are some days that the kid's sinful, human nature is coming out in full force. So the nursery is the escape valve. Basically it is only for homicide prevention when the kid is in a mood – it happens – but ordinarily, we want all the

believers gathered together for worship but especially the babies and the children.

This is where faith is fed and it is not an academic exercise. You don't do it. I don't do it. God does it through his Word and Sacrament that feeds the faith he created at Baptism. That is how conversion works. God does it all. All we do is feed and nurture what God has created with what God provides. You think babies and little children cannot understand and so are bored in church? NO! They love church. It's their parents and other adults who don't understand. Kids love being here and interacting with the worship that goes on. Sometimes their participation needs a little shaping, but if we adults get irritated with children and teenagers in worship then shame on us! Do they need help and guidance? Yes! And who does God provide in their lives to do that post conversion help and guidance? For St. Paul, he sent Ananias. For our children, it's us.

Look at the fourth commandment. Mother and Father are to be honored because they are the people who have been appointed by God to deliver the Gospel to their children and nurture the faith he has created. Mothers and Fathers cannot do all that needs to be done so God places us in the community of the Church where the children will find grandmothers and grandfathers and aunts and uncles and cousins and we are all related folks. It all goes back to Noah coming off the ark and repopulating the earth. All children are our children and we are their Ananias.

Conversion happens here every time we have a Baptism. It is a miracle of God and we are the family privileged to be appointed to care for everyone who is converted. We are Ananias. I don't know how it was for you when you grew up but I was fortunate enough to grow up with a pastor who loved kids. He was the one who invited me to usher, to teach Sunday School, to participate in youth group and finally to attend the seminary. My mother and her best friend Ann Ludwig encouraged me to teach the younger kids in Sunday School. Jim Forthman took me under his wing in High School and molded me to become head usher of the early service. And there were many others who played their part in getting me to be a thriving member of the Church and eventually a pastor.

It is the duty of every adult in the congregation to replace themselves in the Church. The council and committee members mentor and teach the young adults behind them. The Sunday School teachers find young people to assist them and eventually replace them. We can never assume that service to the Church and service to Christ just magically happens. Conversion is all God's doing but it took Ananias to lead, feed and encourage Paul to become the Apostle we know today. We are Ananias. We seek out people in this congregation and start leading, feeding and encouraging the next Pauls, Marys, Peters and Priscillas. By the way. Ananias was not thrilled with his assignment at first either. But imagine his joy and pride when he saw what St. Paul became.