

BAPTISM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF BAPTISM

John's Baptism

Jesus' Baptism

Baptism at Pentecost

Baptism in the First Century

Baptism in the Second Century

Baptism in the Third Century

Baptism in the Fourth Century

Baptism in the Fifth-Twentieth Centuries

Footnotes

CHAPTER 2: HERESIES CONCERNING BAPTISM

Baptismal Regeneration

Infant Baptism

Footnotes

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM

A Proper Candidate

A Proper Mode

A Proper Motive

A Proper Authority

A Proper Administrator

Footnotes

CHAPTER 4: QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The Correct Formula

How Soon

Church Membership

Circumcision

Rebaptism

Letters

CONCLUSION

Footnotes:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF BAPTISM

In studying the subject of baptism, the first thing that should be established is the beginning of baptism and the tracing of it throughout the centuries.

John's Baptism

In looking into the condition of Israel at the time John the Baptist came upon the scene, one can see a people who are in hope of the coming Kingdom. Malachi, the last of the prophets, had prophesied of the coming Kingdom some four hundred years previous. Even if the nation had experienced great trial through these four hundred years they still were held spell-bound by the thoughts of Christ coming to set up His Kingdom.¹

The first mention of baptism in the Bible is in connection with John the Baptist. However, many Biblical scholars hold that the rite of baptism was in existence before the days of the Baptist and that he merely adopted it as the symbol of the work he was doing. Edersheim and Lightfoot both hold to this view.

This position, far from being a fact, is actually untenable. The fact that John was known as "the Baptist" would indicate that his baptism was not to be confounded with Jewish lustrations known at the time. Certainly the New Testament seeks to convey the impression that the baptizing of John was a new rite (Jn. 1:25; 1:33; Mk. 11:30). The question put by the committee on behalf of the Pharisees, "Why baptizeth thou?" would indicate that such a custom was by no means generally known, and that such serious innovations should not be allowed save from the Messiah or from a prophet especially commissioned by God.

Some have denied that John's baptism was Christian baptism. Paul, the Apostle, said this about John's baptism: "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." (Acts 19:4). If this is not Christian, then what is? There is no evidence that any of John's converts were rebaptized.

The Forerunner distinctly explains his purpose in baptizing: "that he (the Messiah) should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing in water" (Jn. 1:31). His baptizing was invariably administered with reference to the One whose coming was at hand (Acts 19:4).

John says again, "I baptized you in water; but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 1:8). John preached the gospel that men were to repent to get right with God, and thus turning from sin to believe on Him who could give them the Holy Spirit. His baptizing then, in the Jordan was a symbol of the very drowning of the old body of sin and the raising to a new Messianic hope.

"The Christian movement began with John."² There can be no doubt of this. As the apostles Peter (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37) and Paul (Acts 13:24-25) looked back over the ministries of both John and Jesus, they were not separately characterized but were viewed as one. It is not from the close of John's ministry they date the preaching of the Messiah's Kingdom, but from the beginning.

The first disciples won by our Lord were trained in the school of John the Baptist. Certainly Andrew and John, apparently Peter and James, Philip and Nathaniel, and possibly the remainder of the twelve, had been followers of the Baptist (Jn. 1:35-51).³ It became the qualification of an apostle that he should have accompanied Jesus "beginning from the baptism of John" (Acts

1:22).

When the church which had been established by the Lord Jesus while He was here on earth met to elect a successor to Judas, no one could qualify except one who had been with them from John's baptism down to that present hour (Acts 1:20-23).⁴ If John's baptism was not Christian baptism, then the baptism of Christ and all the early disciples, including the twelve apostles, was not Christian baptism. How absurd this would be since the church was founded upon Christ and the first members were the Apostles (I Cor. 12:28).

According to A.H. Strong, there is no difference in the baptism of John and the baptism of our time except that John baptized upon profession of faith in a Savior yet to come, while today baptism is administered upon profession of faith in a Savior who has actually and already come.⁵ W.H.T. Dau says: "... evidence fairly compels the belief that there was no essential difference between the baptism of John and the baptism instituted by Christ."⁶ J.R. Graves states that "the practice of the first Christian church confirms the point that the baptism of John was considered essentially the same with Christian baptism."⁷

Jesus' Baptism

John had been baptizing for about six months when Christ appeared upon the bank of the Jordan River. At once John said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Immediately Christ came to be baptized in order that He might fulfill all righteousness.⁸

Why was Christ baptized? Was He baptized unto repentance or for some other reason? Since Jesus had no sin, He could not have been baptized for the repentance of sin. Some say He was baptized to be a representative for a sinful race. Others say He was baptized to separate Himself from sinful Israel and even yet, others say that Jesus was just honoring John's baptism.

The key to the reason Jesus came to John for baptism is given in the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus says to the Baptist, "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). That word "fulfill" does not have the meaning pious scholars give it, "to fill full." Its true connotation is seen in Jesus' use of it in His Sermon on the Mount: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). In other words, Jesus consummated the reality the law and prophets sought to establish. He came to authenticate the law by keeping it and therein declaring it genuine. So the word is used with regard to the moral necessity of Jesus' baptism at the hands of John. Jesus came to authenticate that Baptism, to give it its true meaning, to seal it as being from heaven. John declared he was the Forerunner and baptized for the purpose of man; testing unto Israel the Messiah, but had Jesus not come to that baptism and submitted to it, John had been left suspended, a Forerunner without One who came after. Instead, then, of the mighty Johannine-Christian movement, there would have been the real basis for two separate movements which misunderstanding disciples of John sought to continue anyway. But when Messiah Jesus came and was baptized, therein John's call from sin to righteousness was authenticated as being truly from God, and his movement continued, finding its perfect consummation in Christianity.

Furthermore, in His baptism Jesus dedicated Himself to His Messianic purpose of raising a dead humanity to life. He foresaw the end-His own death, burial and resurrection. Dying with a dead humanity, He is raised to a new and a resurrected life, bringing with Him all who will

believe in His name (Rom. 6:4-11). Nothing could better symbolize the truth of this holy purpose than His burial by John in the Jordan River and His raising out of the water. This is Christ's formal entrance upon His work. Hereafter He is not the carpenter of Nazareth but the Christ of God revealing Himself to those who have open hearts to receive Him.

Baptism at Pentecost

The disciples were gathered at Jerusalem after the ascension of Christ when the Spirit came and abode upon them. They all began to speak in tongues, and all the people there heard the gospel in their own language. Among the speakers was a man called Peter. Did he preach of the Kingdom as John did? No. He preached about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many of the people became convicted and went to the disciples and asked what they must do to be saved. They were immediately told that they must repent and be baptized because of the remission of sin. That same day over three thousand souls were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2).

Baptism in the First Century

Scholars of the first century have left us some writings concerning baptism in their time. Hermes, who wrote in A.D. 95, said that baptism was preached and practiced in his time. Clemens also spoke of baptism during the first century. Ignatius, a disciple of John and elder of the church in Antioch, said baptism was practiced at that time.

Baptism in this century was not practiced in public assemblies but in places specifically prepared for it. Many baptisteries have been discovered that have been hewn out of rock. These baptisteries prove baptism during the first century.⁹

It might be added here, that in John 3:22-26 we have the first quarrel over baptism. The occasion for this debate seems to have arisen thus: "While Jesus and His disciples were baptizing in Judaea, John also was baptizing with his disciples in Aenon near to Salim" (Jn. 3:22-23). Jesus was having much the greater success, insomuch that all men were coming to Him (Jn. 3:26). At this point a Jew appears, one who evidently had sought out Jesus for baptism, for the question arose "on the part of John's disciples" and when he was challenged by the latter for turning away from the call of the Baptist to that of Jesus, immediately an altercation ensued over the relative merits of the two baptisms. Doubtless to the surprise of John's disciples themselves, they were outwitted in their own arguments by this Jew, and that on the basis of John's testimony to Jesus. They carried the matter to their teacher and brought up this particular point about Christ - "to whom thou hast borne witness"; for it was John's lavish admissions that had defeated them. The disciples of John had a good argument in saying that baptism was their master's distinctive rite, that no one else had authority to appropriate it, and that if it were appropriated by others, the repentance baptism of John was sufficient. But the Baptist's testimony to the priority and Messiahship of Jesus could not be denied, and to the amazement of his disciples they lost their cause by their master's own rash and indulgent remarks concerning his rival. When they came to John, every word they speak is a "poisoned arrow" as they frame their very complaint giving him precedence over Jesus.¹⁰

Baptism in the Second Century

During the second century, baptism was still practiced. The rite was practiced only twice a year and at various festivals. The people were baptized only after they had made a profession of faith in Christ and had denounced sin. After this act various ceremonies began which seemed to give great glory over those who were baptized. Soon after this, mystical and supernatural power seemed to be given to this act of baptism. As a result, the false idea of baptismal regeneration resulted. This idea was not practiced very much until the rise of infant baptism in the fourth century.

Justin Martyr, Athenagora, Theophilis of Antioch, Tatian Minucius, Telix, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria constituted the important writers of this time. None of these writers record anything of infant baptism in this century.¹¹

Baptism in the Third Century

The important writers of this time were Dionysius of Alexandria and Arnobius, Professor of Rhetoric at Secca. They said that the method and mode of baptism had not changed from the original mode and method as was practiced in the New Testament times. They never spoke of infant baptism until A.D. 370. At this time bishops began sprinkling people who were ill and could not be immersed. As a result the mode of baptism was changed but not practiced extensively until the fourth century.¹²

Baptism in the Fourth Century

During this century the mode and reasons for baptism still remained the same, that of immersion as a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexander, Ephraim Syrus, and Basil, Bishop of Caesarea all said that the people who were saved were baptized by immersion.

In this century the practice of infant baptism began extensively. Up until now this had been introduced but not practiced; now it becomes prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church and is still practiced by them.¹³

Baptism in the Fifth-Twentieth Centuries

The principle mode of baptism was still immersion in the fundamental Bible-believing churches during these centuries. Infant baptism still remained in the Catholic Church. During the Reformation, when the Catholic Church split, the belief of infant baptism and baptismal regeneration was carried into many of the different religions that exist today.

Chapter two will deal specifically with the problems of infant baptism and baptismal regeneration.

Footnotes

- ¹Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 375-376.
- ² A.T. Robertson, John the Loyal, (New York: Charles Scibner's Sons, 1915) p. 52.
- ³A.T. Robertson, Epochs in the Life of the Apostle John (New Yorks Fleming H. Revell Company, 1935), p. 72.
- ⁴J.H. Melton, Fifty-two Lessons on Act, (Springfield: Crescendo Publications, 1966), p. 80.
- ⁵A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology, III (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1909), 932.
- ⁶W.H.T, Dau, "Baptism," International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939), 396.
- ⁷J.R. Graves, John's Baptism (Texarkana: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1939), p. 73.
- ⁸G.H. Orchard, A Concise History of the Baptist (Lexington: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1956), p. 3.
- ⁹*ibid*, pp. 13-14.
- ¹⁰Robertson, John the Loyal, p. 165.
- ¹¹Orchard, pp. 26-27.
- ¹²*ibid*, p. 82.
- ¹³*ibid*, p. 37.

CHAPTER 2: HERESIES CONCERNING BAPTISM

This chapter will deal with two problem areas concerning baptism today: infant baptism and baptismal regeneration.

Baptismal Regeneration

In the later part of the second century the idea of "baptismal regeneration" began to get a fixed hold in some of the churches.¹

In the year 117, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote a letter on the way to Rome which taught mystical efficacy of baptism. In 140, Hermas wrote that those who descended into the water received forgiveness of sin. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, in the year 246, said that through baptism men were born again, received the forgiveness of sin, and strength for the new life of fulfilling the law of God.²

There are many verses which seemingly indicate clearly that baptism is a part of one's salvation (Matt. 3:15; Luke 7:30; Mark 1:4; 16:16; Rom. 6:5; I Cor. 12:13; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5; Gal. 3:27; I Peter 3:21). What can we do, then, in order to correctly interpret these difficult passages?

There are three basic rules which can be followed for a more correct interpretation of Scripture: (1) give to words the meaning they have in common historical usage (2) always interpret in context (3) interpret from the light of the total revelation that God has given.³

Because of time and space only three of these scriptures will be discussed briefly here at this time. Also, some of these verses will be discussed extensively later on in this paper.

In I Peter 3:21 we read: The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Kenneth Wuest states this about I Peter 3:21:

Water baptism is clearly in the apostle's mind, not the baptism by the Holy Spirit, for he speaks of the waters of the flood as saving the inmates of the ark, and in this verse, of baptism saving believers. But he says that it saves them only as a counterpart. That is, water baptism is the counterpart of the reality, salvation. It can only save as a counterpart, not actually. The Old Testament sacrifices were counterparts of the reality, the Lord Jesus. They did not actually save the believer, only in type. It is not argued here that these sacrifices are analogous to Christian water baptism. The author is merely using them as an illustration of the word "counterpart." So water baptism only saves the believer in type.⁴

J. Clyde Turner gives this explanation of I Peter 3:21:

The saving by baptism which Peter mentions is only symbolic... not actual, as Peter hastens to explain...Baptism, Peter explains, does not wash away the filth of the flesh either in a literal sense, as a bath for the body, or in a metaphorical sense of the filth of the soul...Peter here expressly denies baptismal remission of sin.⁵

One must face I Peter 3:21 and admit that it is not baptism that saves but that which baptism is a figure of.⁶

In John 3:5 another reference to water is made which some mistake to imply water baptism. By comparing John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; John 15:3; John 1:18 and I Peter 1:23, one would find that these verses clearly show that the water is the Word of God. Dr. H.A. Ironside says of the third and fourth chapters of John:

I might add that the way the Lord Jesus Himself speaks of "the water that I shall give him" in John 4:14 is, to my mind, proof conclusive that in neither the third nor fourth chapters does he refer to an ordinance, but to a well of water springing up into everlasting life. And in all of John's writings "the water of life" is clearly the message of the gospel.⁷

Another Scripture which seemingly indicates baptismal regeneration is Acts 2:38. One can see the true meaning of this Scripture by comparing it with Acts 10:44-47. Acts 10:44-47 shows the reception of the Holy Ghost prior to their baptism. This is the situation in Acts 2:38. Also, Peter did not stop with what he said in Acts 2:38, but he goes on in Acts 2:40 to "exhort and testify." Then, he says in verse 41 that those "that gladly received his word were baptized." Since Christ is the Word, then they received Christ prior to baptism.

Dr. John R. Rice states:

There is not a single Bible instance where anyone was baptized without claiming to have a change of heart. Sometimes the word repentance is used, sometimes belief, etc., referring to the same penitent turning of a heart to Christ in saving faith, as coming before baptism. But in no case recorded in the Scriptures was one baptized who did not already claim baptism. John the Baptist demanded evidence of repentance before he would baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him (Matt. 3:7-8). Philip would not baptize the eunuch until he was convinced that he believed in Christ, even "with all thine heart," according to Acts 8:37. In the great commission, in Acts 2:38, and everywhere else, repentance and faith in Christ are put ahead of baptism.⁸

According to Scripture there are seven things in the possession of that person who believes: he will not perish (John 3:14-16), he is not condemned (John 3:18), he hath everlasting life (John 3:36), he is passed from death unto life (John 5:24), he is justified (Romans 5:1), his soul is saved (I Peter 1:9), and he is born of God (I John 5:1). Every believer receives all these things the moment he believes. It is evident from this list that one who has believed on Christ as his personal Savior is saved. If baptism is added then that person is still saved. The fact that baptism does not undo what believing has already accomplished makes the statement true that "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."⁹

Charles Haddon Spurgeon states this about baptismal regeneration:

For of all lies which have dragged millions down to hell, I look upon this as being the most atrocious--that in a Protestant church there should be found

those that swear that baptism saves the soul. Call a man a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or a Dissenter, or a Churchman--that is nothing to me: if he says that baptism saves the soul, out upon him, out upon him, he states what God never taught, what the Bible never laid down, and what ought never to be maintained by men who profess that the Bible, and the whole Bible, is the religion of Protestants.¹⁰

Because of the practice of baptismal regeneration, a serious question arose in the mind of Constantine, "If I am saved from my sins by baptism, what is to become of my sins which I may commit after I am baptized?" He raised a question which has puzzled the world in all succeeding generations. Can baptism wash away yet uncommitted sins? Or, are the sins committed prior to baptism washed away by one method (that is, baptism), and the sins committed subsequent to baptism washed away by another method?¹¹

To make baptism essential to one's salvation makes salvation of works and not totally of Grace. This, of course, Paul refuted with all his power. He insisted that salvation was by grace, and works had nothing to do with it.¹²

By comparing I Corinthians 4:15 with I Corinthians 1:13-17 one finds Paul's refutation of baptismal regeneration. Paul says in I Corinthians 4:15 that he had begotten the Corinthian believers through the gospel. If baptism is essential, then Paul, of necessity, baptized them in order to be able to say he had begotten them, which he testifies that he had done. But in I Corinthians 1:13-17 he says that he is thankful that he had only baptized a few but begat them all. Then he goes on to say that Jesus Christ had sent him to preach the gospel and not to baptize.

If baptism is made a requirement for salvation, then Dwight L. Moody (the great evangelist), John Wesley (soul winner and revivalist), John G. Payton (missionary to the New Hebrides), Dr. James Gray (head of Moody Bible Institute), and millions of others who have sung their way to glory from death beds, all of whom were never immersed, are in hell today.¹³

If one says that baptism is essential to salvation, then to be consistent one must conclude that the Old Testament saints are lost, because none were baptized.¹⁴ Yet Romans 4 tells us that Abraham was justified by faith, in spite of his lacking baptism. The fact that Abraham was in a different dispensation has nothing to do with his salvation, for God has only one plan of salvation for all ages, not one for each dispensation.

J.R. Graves lists eight reasons why he cannot accept baptismal regeneration:

1. Baptism is not a divinely appointed means to secure the actual remission of our sins (Acts 10:43-47; John 3:14-17, 35).
2. Baptism is not a sacrament in and by which our sins are actually cleansed away (I John 1:7; Rom. 3:23).
3. Nor is baptism an act or sacrament by or on account of which we obtain justification before God (Rom. 3:28; 4-5; Gal. 5:4; Rom. 10:4-11).
4. Nor is it in, or by, baptism that we receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13; 2:1-7; II Cor. 5:17).
5. Baptism is not the means by or through which we are regenerated or born again, as all the Protestant, as well as Catholic creeds do teach (Matt. 3:18; 4:17; Luke 17:21).

6. Nor is baptism appointed to secure our spiritual union with Christ, by which we become the children of God (Gal. 3:26).
7. Nor does baptism in any way introduce us into, or secure for us the grace of God, by which we receive remission of sins and salvation (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 3:12).
8. Nor is baptism a seal, or the seal, of the Covenant of Grace, that not only offers and applies, but confirms all the blessings of that covenant to us (Eph. 1:13; 4:30).¹⁵

A real Baptist believes that anyone who repents toward God and puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior is saved, anywhere, every-where, under any circumstance, in or out of any church of any denomination, with or without church membership or baptism.¹⁶

Infant Baptism

Infant baptism developed out of a belief that baptism was efficacious, thus a heresy called baptismal regeneration resulted?¹⁷

There are two things that had an influence in the rise of infant baptism. They are superstition and heathenism. Superstition began with heathen people who were already degenerate. They believed that some strange power was given to baptism, and thus they believed that baptism saved. As a result, they adopted infant baptism so if the children died they would go to heaven instead of hell. This principle was soon adopted by the church state and became part of their beliefs and practice.

The Talmud records that Jews baptized the children of imprisoned parents so they could be saved. In the early Germanic tribes, it is recorded that there was a form of dipping and pouring of water upon children and this was given the name of baptism. In the religious customs of the Romans, the aqua lustratis, or water purification, played an important part. A lustratio liberorium, or purification of deliverance, took place with newly born girls on the eighth day and with boys on the ninth day in order to protect them against sorcery. This was accomplished by baptism.¹⁸

J.K. Carroll states:

During the first three centuries, congregations all over the East subsisted in separate independent bodies, unsupported by government and consequently without any secular power over one another. All this time they were baptized churches, and though all the fathers of the first four ages, down to Jerome (A.D. 370), were of Greece, Syria and Africa, and though they give great numbers of histories of the baptism of adults, yet there is not one of the baptism of a child till the year 370.¹⁹

In 370 A.D. the son of Emperor Valens was ill and close to death. Valens sent for the church bishop, and the bishop baptized the boy. This began a movement which has lasted throughout the ages by the Roman Catholic Church and many other of the churches today.²⁰

In A.D. 416, the Catholic Church passed a law making infant baptism compulsory.²¹ The Roman Catholics include baptism as one of their sacraments. The dictionary says, "A sacrament is

a religious ceremony or act, regarded as an out-ward sign of an inward and spiritual grace." The Catholics do not accept this definition, rather they say it is not a symbol but the act itself.²²

In the book entitled, What Catholics Believe, several statements concerning infant baptism are recorded. The following statement is made by the Catholics in this book:

All good comes to us by the Precious Blood...It is by the Sacraments that the merits of the Precious Blood are applied to our souls. They are thus the chief means of our salvation...For the Sacraments are not merely signs of grace, they give the grace they signify. A little water is poured on the body and the baby's soul is cleansed from original sin. Baptism is a sacrament which cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, members of the church, and heirs of heaven...Baptism also forgives actual sins, that is the sins which we ourselves commit, and takes away all punishment due to them, when it is received proper disposition by those who have been guilty of actual sin.²³

Why do these people believe in infant baptism? There are some good and honest people who believe that it is taught in the scriptures. Most Catholics leave the interpretation of the scriptures to the priest and do not study for themselves.

People also practice infant baptism because of tradition. They do it because it has been done for centuries, whether it is based upon the Word of God or not. Others practice it because they say that the Bible does not say for them not to baptize infants.²⁴

There are several passages of scripture that the Catholics try to use as proof for infant baptism. First, they say that Jesus baptized infants in Matthew 19:13-15:

Then were there brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them and prays and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children and forbid them not, to come unto me; for such is the Kingdom of Heaven. And he laid His hands on them and departed thence. ²⁵

Second, they say that the water washed the blood from the hands of Pilate after he had committed Christ to death as found in Matthew 27:24: "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it."²⁶

Others try to prove infant baptism by saying that circumcision was replaced by baptism. In the Old Testament, God commanded that the male children of the Jewish race were to be circumcised before their twelfth birthday. The Catholics say that Christ replaced this law with baptism; therefore, infant baptism is proper.²⁷

Another way the Catholics try to prove infant baptism is by saying that infants were baptized in the household baptisms of Lydia and her house in Acts 16:15, "And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying...". The second household baptism was the household of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:31-33:

And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house. And they spoke 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.”

The Catholics say there must have been children in this family.²⁸ The idea, however, that there were children in the homes of these household baptisms cannot be proven. The people in these homes had to hear the Word first and believe and then they were baptized.

The Catholics say that water can wash away sin; but according to the Scriptures, only the blood of Christ can wash away (I John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; Jer. 2:22). Water, therefore, cannot save, only the blood of Christ.²⁹

Throughout the scriptures baptism never preceded belief. It is always "believe and thou shalt be saved," and "believe and be baptized." Several scriptures testify to this statement: Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36-37; 9:18; 10:47-48 and 16:29-34. Baptism is important, but believing and receiving are the essential elements for salvation and not water.³⁰

The idea that circumcision was replaced by baptism is also incorrect. Christ never mentions this change. The apostles never mention this change. Circumcision was given as an external sign to the heathen people that the Jewish people were the chosen people. Baptism is the symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These two rites in no way resemble. Both baptism and circumcision were practiced by the Jewish Christians in the New Testament; therefore, circumcision could not have been replaced by baptism. Circumcision was also only for the males. Baptism is for everyone who believes. It cannot be circumcision.³¹

For a thorough discussion on infant baptism consult J.R. Graves book, John's Baptism. He lists and discusses thirty-four arguments against infant baptism.

Infant baptism cannot be scriptural. It is claimed to be founded upon the scriptures, but is really an invention of man. Christ never appointed it. The Apostles never practiced it. Infant baptism should not be included as a Christian rite.³²

Footnotes

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³J.H. Melton, Class Lecture, Springfield, Mo., Baptist Bible College, January 8, 1971.

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⁵J. Clyde Turner, The New Testament Doctrine of the Church, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1951), pp. 10-11.

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⁹Norris-Wallace Debate (Ft. Worth: The Fundamentalist Publishing Company, 1935). p. 107.

- ¹⁰Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Spurgeon's Sermons, VIII (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 18.
- ¹¹J.M. Carroll, p. 17
- ¹²Turner, p. 11.
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- ²⁹I.M. Haldeman, The Truth About Baptism (Bristol: The Evangelistic Press, n.d.), p. 15.
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CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM

This chapter will discuss the five prerequisites to scriptural baptisms a proper candidate, a proper mode, a proper motive, a proper authority, and a proper administrator.

A Proper Candidate

In the New Testament only those who believed were baptized, and then only after their public profession of faith. John the Baptist required repentance, then baptism.¹ In The Anti-Nicine Fathers, the requirements of a candidate's character are recorded:

The character of the candidate should be free from iniquity, left the working of sin; the friend of God, the enemy of the devil, the heir of God the Father, the fellow-heir of His Son, denounces Satan and the demons and Satan's deceits; chaste, pure, holy, beloved of God, the Son of God, praying as a son to his father, and saying as from the common congregation of the faithful the Lord's Prayer.²

Roy Branson, Jr. says that only saved persons are baptized. Jesus Himself was baptized (Matt. 3:13-17), and had his disciples baptize all who were saved (John 4:1-2). In the book of Acts we find that those who were saved were baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:36-38; 19:4-5 ; 10:48; 16:14-15; 16:33) and of course Paul was baptized upon his being saved (Acts 9:18).³

I. M. Haldeman has this to say about who has the right to be baptized:

All who sincerely believe our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that He died, was buried and rose again; all who offer Him by faith as a sacrifice for sin and claim Him as a personal substitute, have the right and privilege to be baptized. None others have that right, none others can participate in that privilege . A person incapable of exercising faith must not be baptized.⁴

One scripture used by baptismal regenerationists is Matthew 3:11, "I indeed baptize you with (eis) water unto repentance." Dr. J.H. Melton says the meaning of this verse "depends on the translation of the Greek preposition "eis," which should be translated in Matthew 3:11, Acts 2:38, and elsewhere "because of." He further states:

To substantiate this fact, look at Matthew 12:41, where this same preposition, "eis," is employed and is rendered by the English word "at."...Matthew 3:11, should read, "I indeed baptize you with (in reference to) water because of repentance."... In Matthew 3:11; 12:41, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3, and Acts 2:38, the Greek preposition "eis" must be translated "with reference to" or "because of" in order to fit the local context and the general context of the whole Scripture.⁵

So one can see that only a truly regenerated person is the proper candidate for baptism.

A Proper Mode

There are several reasons why only immersion can be the proper mode. First, the New Testament descriptions of baptism require immersion: "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straight way out of the water." (Matt. 3:16). "And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38). "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:5-6). "And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan" (Mk. 1:8).

The second reason that immersion is the proper mode is the meaning of the word "baptize," which is the Greek word from which baptism was transliterated. Reference to a lexicon or to an English-Greek concordance will reveal that baptism is a transliteration and not a translation. The translators did not translate the word 'baptizo', but gave the word an entirely different meaning. Why was the word 'immerse' not used in the English? In the book, Christian Assembly, the import of this word is explained. It says that the act of sprinkling had already been introduced in Britian and was practiced in the Church of England. The men who translated the Bible did not want to change this practice, so they evaded the truth about baptism and added the word baptize which could mean anything.⁶ Edward Beecher also speaks of the import of baptism. He says:

At the time of the translation of the Bible a controversy had arisen with regard to the import of the word, so that, although it was conceded to have an import in the original, yet it was impossible to assign it in the English any meaning, without seeming to take sides in the controversy then pending. Accordingly, in order to take neither side, they did not attempt to give the sense of the term in a significant English word so they merely transferred the word, baptize, with slight alteration, to our language. The consequence was that it does not express its original significancy to the mind of the English reader, or indeed any significance except what was derived from its application to designate an external visible rite.⁷

If the translators had faithfully translated the Word of God, there would have been only one baptism practiced today, that of immersion. The translators purposefully mistranslated the Word of God so as not to give Baptists the testimony of the Word of God.⁸

The word baptism comes from three Greek words. They are: teapto, found eighty times in the Greek New Testament, means the practice of baptism; baptisma, found twenty-two times in the Greek New Testament, means the act of baptism; and baptisimos, found four times in the Greek New Testament, means the act of baptism. These three Greek words come from one word, baptizo, which means to dip, plunge, or immerse. Since many religions practice sprinkling, a study of the words which mean to sprinkle would be most interesting. Louo, found six times, means to wash, and it is not ever used as baptism; nipto, found seventeen times, means to wash part of the body, and it is never used for baptism; breko, found seven times, means to wet, moisten, or rain upon, and it is never used for baptism; rantize, used four times, means to sprinkle, which is so widely used yet, and this word is never used for baptism; keo, found many times, means to pour but is never used for baptism; and katharizo, used thirty

times, means to purify but never for baptism. By the definitions of these words, immersion can only be the proper mode of baptism.⁹

In the Hebrew and the Aramaic, which the Lord and the Apostles also spoke besides Greek, the words for baptism are: tabal and baptein. Both of these words mean immersion. These words cannot be used for sprinkling. An example from scripture shows the difference: "And the priest shall dip (Hebrew, tabal; Greek, bapto) his finger in the blood and shall sprinkle (Hebrew, histi; Greek, prosranci) it..." By this example only immersion can be understood for baptism,¹⁰

That "baptize" means to immerse is the testimony of Dr. Conant, acknowledged to be one of the best Greek scholars in the continent, who collected and translated every instance of the use of "baptize" by every Greek author whose work is extant. The results were that every Greek author had used the term in every instance in the sense of "to dip, to immerse, plunge, or submerge;" never was it used in the sense of "to sprinkle."¹¹

J.R. Graves gives a list of sixty-two standard Greek Lexicons which give the meaning of "baptize" as "to dip, to immerse."¹²

A.T. Robertson, recognized as one of the foremost Greek scholars of modern times, says that the uniform meaning of "baptize" in the New Testament is "dip," and the use of the river Jordan for baptizing makes inevitable the notion of immersion. He states further that no Baptist has written a lexicon of the Greek language, and yet the standard lexicons, like that of Liddell and Scott, Thayer, and others uniformly give the meaning of "baptize" as "dip, immerse." There is never an instance where this word means "pour" or "sprinkle." He also quotes Sophocles, himself a native Greek, of the church of England, and Dr. Plummer, as giving the meaning to be immersion.¹³

All church historians, whether, Catholic, Protestant, ancient, medieval, or modern, are agreed that immersion was the mode of the early church.¹⁴

The Greek Church covers Greece, Russia, Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Abyssinia, and other oriental countries. This church has corrupted many of the doctrines of the Bible, but they have retained the correct form of baptism.

Deylin says that the Greeks retain the rite of immersion to this day as was stated by Jeremiah the Patriarch of Constantinople. Dr. Whitley says:

The observation of the Greek Church is this; thus he who ascended out of the water must first descend into its Baptism, therefore, is to be performed not by sprinkling, but by washing of the body, indeed, it can only be from ignorance of the Jewish rites that this can be questioned.¹⁵

The Greek Catholic Church separated from the Roman Catholics in A.D. 1054. Immersion has been practiced by them ever since.¹⁶

Baptism by immersion can also be proved by the testimony of history. Men have stated throughout church history that baptism by immersion was the correct practice. The early churches in the New Testament practiced immersion as was proven by the baptism of the eunuch and others. There were no exceptions during the first two centuries. Not until the third century was sprinkling introduced.¹⁷ Hermes, Justen Martyr, Tertullian, Chrysostom, and others who

wrote during the first three centuries all speak of baptism by immersion only.¹⁸

G.H. Orchard also gives some information on the early baptisteries:

Baptisteries are of different forms and of very high antiquity as that of St. John's connected with the church of Constantinople. In Italy, although the churches were numerous in some of the most considerable cities there was only one general baptistery, to which all resorted. Of the baptisteries of Rome the Lateran is the most ancient. This baptistery was made out of an old mansion house given by Constantine to Bishop Sylvester, and was endowed with a handsome income. The dimensions have been preserved. One was prepared for the baptism of Clovis, King of France and his majesty, with three thousand of his subjects, were plunged, says Mezeray, on Christmas Day, 496. The baptistry of Pisa, both externally and internally presents a fine display of the most exquisite workmanship. The baptistry of Florence is remarkable for the beauty of its gates. The Italian baptistery in appearance is not dissimilar to the Octagon in Ely Cathedra.¹⁹

With the testimony of the building of these baptisteries, only immersion can be understood for the proper mode of baptism.

Another proof that immersion was practiced is the fact that when baptism was taking place much water had to be present. John 3:23 says, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim because there was much water there..." Why would much water be needed if the people were to be sprinkled? Sprinkling was, therefore, not practiced but immersion was.²⁰ Curcellaeus says that baptism was preformed by plunging the whole body into the water, and not just by sprinkling a few drops of water on the head as is practiced now. John was baptizing near Aenon because of much water.²¹ Frank A. Godsoe says New Testament baptism requires:

1. Water (Acts 8:36; 10:47)
2. Much water (John 3:23; Mark 1:5)
3. Going down into the water (Acts 8:38)
4. Burial in water (Romans 6:4-6; Colossians 2:12)
5. Coming up out of the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:39; Mark 1:9-10)²²

Baptists believe what the Bible says and hunt "much water," when they go to baptize. The Bible says that Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John (Matt. 3:13). That is why Baptists go to the water instead of bringing the water to the candidate. The Bible says Jesus was baptized in Jordan (Mark 1:9). That is why Baptists baptize in water instead of putting water on the candidate. It takes "much water," "going to the water," "going into the water," a burial and a resurrection and a "coming out of the water" to make a Bible baptism.²³

The meaning of Baptism is stated in Romans 6:4. Since baptism must bury, any baptism so called which does not bury is not scriptural baptism. Thus baptism is immersion. Conybeare and Howson make this comment about Romans 6:4:

With him therefore, we are buried by baptism, wherein we figuratively

shared his death. This clause, which is here left elliptical, is fully expressed in Col. 2:12, "Buried with him in baptism," etc. This passage cannot be understood, unless it & borne in mind that the primitive baptism was by immersion.²⁴

When the believer goes into the water, death is pictured; when he goes under the water, burial is pictured; when he comes up out of the water, resurrection is pictured. All this symbolism is lost when sprinkling or pouring is practiced--the very meaning of the ordinance is gone.²⁵ Dr. J.H. Melton sums it up with the following comment:

Since baptism symbolizes death, burial, and resurrection; and death, burial and resurrection constitute the doctrine to which the Apostle refers, then baptism as a symbol of the doctrine, is, must be, and cannot be otherwise than a burial, an immersion of the Body of the believer in water and a rising again therefrom.²⁶

It has already been proven that the proper mode of baptism is immersion only. However let us take a brief look at the subject of sprinkling.

Sprinkling was practiced the first time in the middle of the third century when a man on his sick bed was sprinkled instead of immersed, because it was "more convenient." It was not until the twelfth century that it became prevalent in the Catholic Church.²⁷ The Encyclopaedia Britannica gives this statement about sprinkling:

The usual mode of performing the ceremony was by immersion. In the case of sick persons (clinics), the minister was allowed to baptize by pouring water upon the head or by sprinkling. In the early church, clinical baptism, as it was called, was only permitted in cases of necessity; but the practice of baptism by sprinkling, gradually came in in spite of the opposition of councils and hostile decrees. The Council of Ravenna, in 1311, was the first council of the church which legalized baptism by sprinkling - by leaving it to the choice of the officiating minister.²⁸

In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it is said that after Peter's sermon, "the same day there were added about three thousand souls" to the disciples. This statement has been regarded by Pedo-baptists in general as a very serious objection to the act of baptism by immersion.²⁹ It is a common matter of history that as many as three thousand persons have often been baptized in one day. It is a fact that John Clough, a Baptist Missionary in India, in five hours, with the assistance of five native helpers, immersed 2,222 converts. It is a fact that Crysostom tells how on April 16, A.D. 404, he baptized 3,000 in Constantinople. It is a fact that Paulinus baptized 10,000 in the river Swab, and 3,000 in one day in the pool at Harbottle, Northumberland, A.D. 627. It is a fact that King Amalgaidle, his seven sons, and 12,000 men were baptized by immersion in one day.³⁰

Sprinkling and pouring did not originate with Christ and the Apostolic preachers, nor did it originate during the first two hundred and twenty-five years of the Christian era. R.A. Venable

gives six reasons for the rise of sprinkling as a mode of baptism:

1. The erroneous conception of the saving power of baptism gave rise to the change of God's command.
2. Convenience came in to play a conspicuous part in deciding the question.
3. A formal enactment by a council had served to render lawful these substitutes.
4. It is a striking example of the triumph of common sense over the bondage of form and custom.
5. God requires me to be obedient, and I have just as much of the spirit of obedience in being sprinkled as in being immersed.
6. Those who sprinkle and pour are just as successful, and enjoy just as much of the Divine favor as those who practice immersion.³¹

Mr. Venable gives quite a lengthy discussion on each of these points.

A Proper Motive

There are different resurrections pictured by baptism. First, baptism pictures the burial and resurrection of Christ. This is the greatest significance of baptism. It is a picture of what happened to the Savior. After his death on the cross, he was laid in a tomb, from which he was resurrected three days later. Baptism shows this very thing.

The second resurrection pictured by baptism is the resurrection of the believer to new life in Christ. The believer is now dead to his sins (Rom. 6:2) where as before, he was dead in his sins. The Spirit has quickened us to life (Ephesians 2:5) and we are made new creatures to live differently in all matters (II Cor. 5:17). Baptism is a picture of the believer's death and burial to the life in Christ.³² Roy Branson Jr. states:

First, it is a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. When we go beneath the waters it is a picture of His death for our sins and His burial. When we come up out of the water it is a picture of His resurrection from the dead. Secondly, it is a picture of our own salvation. Going under the waters portrays the forgiveness of our sins and the death of the old, hell bound soul. Coming up out of the waters portrays the rebirth of our new heaven bound soul.³³

Dr. J.H. Melton says:

When you are scripturally baptized you proclaim, not only your faith that Christ died, was buried and rose again; not only that you are judicially identified with Him in His death, His burial and resurrection, but that should you, yourself, die and be buried, like Him you, too, would rise from the dead.³⁴

One may also say that the person being baptized is showing that he is placing his faith in Jesus Christ to save him. It points back to Christ and says all my faith and hope for heaven is in the death,

burial, and resurrection of Jesus, of which baptism is a symbol. It is a public profession of faith.³⁵

In conclusion, one could say that baptism is a death (Romans 6:11), a burial (Romans 6:4-5), a resurrection (Colossians 2:17), a testimony of a saved person to salvation (Acts 2:31), a testimony of a saved person's faith (Matthew 28:19-20), and is the door to the church (Acts 2:41).³⁶

A Proper Authority

As much as is recorded in the Scriptures concerning the proper authority for baptism, it seems that Christ gave the local New Testament Church this authority. Christ commanded the assembly in Matthew 28:19-20 to baptize. The early church baptized at Pentecost.³⁷ No other group in the scriptures has the authority to baptize. Baptism is only to be conducted by the local church.³⁸

The authority to baptize is an authority given to a corporate entity, not an authority given to individuals. In the New Testament churches there is never any question raised about this authority.³⁹

Willard A. Ramsey lists the following statements concerning the proper authority for baptism:

- a. Institutional authority based upon the choice and sanction of God is a biblical principle of long standing (Deut. 12:5-14).
- b. God identified an agent authorized by Himself to institute Christian baptism (Mark 1:1-5), and "sent" him to baptize (John 1:33). All authority must derive ultimately from God. Hence, He sent John the Baptist for this work.
- c. Since John was God's authorized agent, Christ submitted to him (Matt. 3:13).
- d. Since John's baptism has the authority of heaven on it, men are accountable for the way they regard it (Matt. 21:23-27). They rejected God's own counsel by rejecting John's baptism (Luke 7:30), but those who received it, as did Christ, vindicated or justified God (Luke 7:29).
- e. Those who John had baptized and prepared for Christ began to baptize in the same way (John 4:1-2), and continued until after Christ's ascension (Acts 1:21-22). From these Christ had formed His church and commissioned it (Matt. 16:18-19; 28:18-20).
- f. The authority to administer the affairs of the Kingdom of heaven was conferred to the church by Christ during His personal ministry (Matt. 16:19; 18:17-18; Luke 12:32). This church was first composed of the apostles (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20).
- g. God authenticated the authority of the church miraculously at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4; cf. Acts 10:44-45; 11:15-17; 15:8). Compare God's authentication of the tabernacle in Exo. 40:33-35 and the temple in I Kings 8:10-11. This authority was honored by God throughout the ministry of the early church (Acts 8:14-17; 9:10-17; 19:1-6).
- h. This authority once conferred is perpetual, as is the church. This authority is perpetuated through the churches. The perpetuity of the church is a

Bible doctrine (Matt. 16:18; 28:20; II Tim. 2:2; Eph. 3:10-11, 21). The church has never ceased to exist, nor has it ever apostatized as an institution. It never will.

- i. In conclusion, any baptism not administered with the authority of a Biblical church is not valid. Any individual or other organization which presumes to baptize has only its own authority, and no man is obliged to recognize it. A scriptural church will not recognize it but will carefully regard the principle of authority. Hence, every man is accountable to seek out a scriptural authority (a true church) for baptism as Christ sought out John because God had authorized him, and every church is accountable to preserve and teach this principle to men.⁴⁰

A Proper Administrator

The administrator of baptism is of supreme importance. The Lord Jesus organized his church and promised that from the time he started it - it would remain in the earth until he comes again (Matt. 16:18; 28:20). It was to this church he gave the great commission. Into their hands he committed baptism (John 4:1-2). Some people have the idea that baptism can be administered by anybody, but this is not true. The Lord Jesus invested the authority in a New Testament Church. Alien baptism is a baptism administered by one who has no authority to perform the act and has the wrong purpose or design in doing it. God commanded John the Baptist to establish the ordinance and placed it first in his hands (John 1:33). Jesus walked sixty miles to get the one and only person who had the authority to administer baptism when he was baptized. Jesus then committed baptism into the hands of his church (John 4:1-2; Matt. 28:20).⁴¹

In the "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles" it states who should and who should not administer baptism. First, it says that women should not baptize. This was practiced by heathenism and not by the New Testament Churches. This is also contrary to the nature of God by allowing women to be over men. Secondly, it states that the laity is not to perform this rite. Thirdly, it states that only the bishop is to perform this rite.⁴² It would seem more probable that the pastor should do the baptizing or any other authorized person of the church.⁴³

Dr. J.H. Melton comments:

One of the strongest proofs that the authority to baptize is not vested in the individual is found in Acts 19:1-6. Paul came to Ephesus and found certain disciples which claimed John's baptism, but they had not even so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. How could they have been immersed by John the Baptist? He always preached concerning the Holy Spirit. He prophesied that on the day of Pentecost they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Who immersed these disciples at Ephesus? The evidence of scripture is that some follower of John the Baptist took it upon himself as an individual to baptize. Yet he did not know how to tell people how to be saved, much less tell them how to be scripturally baptized. The Apostle Paul who was sent out from the Church at Antioch with the authority to establish other churches, administers scriptural baptism to these

disciples, and makes them charter members of the church at Ephesus.⁴⁴

The administrator of baptism needs to have the proper authority of a New Testament Church in order to baptize.

Footnotes

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⁶J.R. Littleproud, The Christian Assembly (Denver: Wilson Foundation, n.d.), PP. 102-105.

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⁹Edward T. Hiscox, The New Directory for Baptist Churches, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publications, 1902), pp. 395-397.

¹⁰G.H. Lang, Baptism (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1958), pp. 42-50

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¹⁴J. R. Graves, The Act of Christian Baptism, p. 20.

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¹⁶D.N. Jackson, The Mode of Baptism (Oklahoma City: American Baptist, 1967), p. 4.

¹⁷Paul N. Jackson, The Doctrine and Administration of the Church (Des Plains: Regular Baptist Press, 1968), p. 62.

¹⁸Hiscox, pp. 414-417.

¹⁹G.H. Orchard, A Concise History of Baptist (Lexington: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1956), p. 38.

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²²Frank A. Godsoe, The House of God A Blood-Bought Body (Hawaii: Lanakila Baptist Press,

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²³H. Boyce Taylor, Sr., Why Be a Baptist (Lexington: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1972), p. 10.

²⁴J.R. Graves, The Act of Christian Baptism, p. 43.

²⁵Littleproud, p. 105.

²⁶Melton, p. 87.

²⁷Branson, Jr., p. 65.

²⁸William Benton, "Baptism," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1965). III, 351.

²⁹John T. Christian, Immersion The Act of Christian Baptism (Springfield: The Preachers Press, 1974), p. 71.

³⁰Godsoe, p. 139.

³¹R.A. Venable, The Origin of Sprinkling for Baptism (Texarkana: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928), pp. 48-57.

³²J. Clyde Turner, The New Testament Doctrine of the Church (Nashville: Convention Press, 1951), p. 75.

³³Branson Jr., p. 62.

³⁴Melton, p. 88.

³⁵John R. Rice, Bible Baptism (Wheaton: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1943). P. 7.

³⁶Rev. G.E. Hodges, The New Testament Church, Baptism, Lord's Supper (Jacksonville: Beaver Street Baptist Church, n.d.), pp. 8-10.

³⁷Christian, A History of the Baptist, p. 102.

³⁸Paul N. Jackson, p. 66.

³⁹Noel Smith, Jews, Gentiles, and the Church (Springfield: The Preachers Press, 1974), p. 111.

⁴⁰Willard A. Ramsey, The Nature of the New Testament Church on Earth (Greenville: Hallmark Baptist Church, 1973), pp. 22-23.

⁴¹Clarence Walker, Sinners! Lost Sinners! Saved Sinners! (Lexington: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1945), p. 32.

⁴²Roberts, p. 429.

⁴³Paul N. Jackson, p. 66.

⁴⁴Melton, p. 90.

CHAPTER 4: QUESTIONS ANSWERED

This chapter will deal with some of the more frequently asked questions concerning baptism. Some of these deal with the proper formula, how soon after salvation should one be baptized, and why one must be baptized into a local church.

The Correct Formula

Baptism must be in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19-20). Notice that baptism in Matthew 28:19 is to be administered not in the names, but in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

It is the declaration that while Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three, they are of one substance and have but one name and that is God.

The three persons are not three Gods; but three persons constituting one God, that is, one Being.

As a consequence one cannot baptize in the name of one of the persons and not the other two. To do so would be to deny the unit name and the Trinity which that name proclaims.

Nevertheless, in the book of Acts it is recorded that baptism took place in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the strength of that there are those who administer the ordinance in the name of the Son alone. They are greatly in error.

To be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as given in the book of Acts means to be baptized upon a confession of faith in His name. His official name is the Son of God. This was the name given Him by the Father at His baptism. It was the name He, Himself, claimed while on earth.

Any baptism which omits the name of the Father and the Holy Ghost is not Scriptural baptism. It splits the divine name, robs two of the infinite persons, and carries with it a denial of the trinity of the Godhead.¹

The Church at least from the first century onward adopted the Trinitarian formula. If our Lord's words did not prescribe a form of words, at least they suggested it. We find it in the Didache and Justin and Tertullian write, making mention of the Trinitarian formula being the correct formula. The Trinitarian formula is the only one found in the church in ancient times. Origen, Platt, and the Apostolic Canons refer to the Trinitarian formula. The fact that the Apostolic Canons forbids any other form probably shows that in some heretical circles other words were used.²

William Evans says that baptism is in the name of the triune God (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-41; 10:47-48; 22:16; cf. Rom. 10:9-10).³

J. Newton Brown lists the following scriptures as proof texts for baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19; Acts 10:47-48; Gal. 3:27-28).⁴

How Soon

A command admits of no delay. If one is a genuine believer, he is a soldier of our Lord Jesus

Christ. He is our Captain; and when He says to be baptized, one has no rights, even, for a moment to think about it. The obligation is to arise straightway and be baptized.

This is illustrated in the experience of Paul. Ananias said to him: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16).

He was not to wash away his sins by baptism, but by calling on the name of the Lord; as it is written: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13).

He was not to delay, he was to arise and be baptized immediately. His baptism was to be a confession of faith that he claimed and owned a saving Lord. He must make that confession at once. There are those who say: "When I think I can live the Christian life as I ought to live it, I will be baptized." But, if a person is not willing to obey the first mechanical command, how can he expect to meet the spiritual demands? If a person starts his Christian career with disobedience, or hesitation to obey, how can he enter into spiritual communion with the Lord?

Besides that, baptism is not a profession of your ability to live the Christian life; it is an official confession that one is a sinner saved by grace; that nothing but the substitutionary, sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ has given a right of approach to a holy God. The only hope of righteous living is in a risen Lord, in the spiritual life He will furnish according to one's faith to receive it.

Baptism is a confession of one's helplessness in himself and his confidence and resource in the Lord.

In final terms baptism is an issue of one's obedience or disobedience.⁵

Dr. S. E. Anderson states:

In the New Testament it seems that every convert was baptized immediately after his conversion, e.g., "the same hour of the night" (Acts 16:33: 18:8). An unbaptized convert is by that much a disobedient one, and can claim none of the privileges of church membership such as communion. If a Simon (Acts 8:9-24) is mistakenly baptized, it is accidental and not intentional.⁶

The church of the New Testament specified baptism immediately after conversion. It was so in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40), with Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17-18), with Peter and Cornelius' household of believers (Acts 10:44-48), with Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34). Baptism is the first obligation of every convert to Christ.⁷

Church Membership

One of the best explanations I found on the subject of baptism into the local New Testament Church was by Dr. J. H. Melton in his book The Law of Exclusion. This section will start out with a quite lengthy condensed version of Dr. Melton's explanation.

I Corinthians 12:13, because of an unfortunate translation, is used by some to teach Holy Spirit baptism. The King James Version translates I Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..." The correct translation of I Corinthians 12:13 is: "For in one spirit were all baptized into one body." The capitalizing of the word "spirit" (pneuma) is utterly misleading. For the benefit of those who do not read the New Testament in the Greek, there are no capital letters used except at the beginning of a book or paragraph.

'Pneuma' is always written in the Greek with a small 's.' Where the Holy Spirit of God is referred

to, a capital is rightly employed.

In I Corinthians 12:13, "spirit" has the force of oneness of thought, accord, object. In Philippians 1:27, the Greek for "in one spirit" is precisely the same in every respect as the Greek at the beginning of I Corinthians 12:13. In Philippians 1:27 the translators have used only a small "s" for "spirit"---as they most certainly should have done in I Corinthians 12:13.

The preposition translated "by" in I Corinthians 12:13 is "en," translated "in") 1,863 times in the New Testament. "In one spirit were we all baptized," should be the translation of I Corinthians 12:13. The baptism here is not Holy Spirit baptism at all, but water baptism. Whenever we read of "baptism" in the New Testament without anything in the verse or context which expressly describes it (as in Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5), it is always water baptism.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling," (Ephesians 4:4).

"For in one spirit were we all baptized into one body." (I Cor. 12:13). The one body is inseparably related to the one baptism. Of what body is water baptism required as a prerequisite for membership?

Every saved person is born spiritually into the Kingdom: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God," (John 3:3). "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

But a saved person must be "added" to the ecclesia (Acts 2:41). The means by which a saved person is added to the local assembly, the one body, is water baptism.

Ecclesia appears 115 times in the Greek text. In 92 of these usages, the reference is to a particular assembly in a particular location. In the other 23 usages, the common meaning of assembly should be given to ecclesia unless there is some definite reason for a meaning other than that of common usage. There is not one single instance in the New Testament in which ecclesia should be translated with any meaning other than that of assembly. Ecclesia never means what is commonly referred to as the universal invisible church.

In I Corinthians 1:2, Paul addresses the epistle, "Unto the assembly which is at Corinth." In I Corinthians 12:27, Paul says to the recipients of this epistle, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." In the following verse the apostle says, "And God hath set some in the assembly..."

The passage most often used to teach that "the church which is his body" is an invisible universal body is I Corinthians 12. But let us examine this passage. In the first place, the first epistle to the Corinthians is addressed to the church (assembly) of God at Corinth. It is the strongest epistle in the New Testament. In chapters one through three, Paul deals with factions in "the local assembly" at Corinth. In chapter five, Paul deals with the case of a man in the church at Corinth who was living with his stepmother. In chapters six through eight, Paul answers questions the Corinthians had addressed to him concerning civil suits, marriage, and things offered to idols. In chapter 11, Paul sets forth the requirements of proper observance of the Lord's Supper in that and other local assemblies. It is an unspeakable travesty of exegesis to apply the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians to any other group than the same local assembly to which the rest of the epistle is addressed.

The baptism referred to in I Corinthians 12:13 is water baptism. Seven times in the first chapter of I Corinthians Paul speaks of water baptism. In 15:29, he refers to the unscriptural practice observed then, and now promulgated by the Mormons, of being baptized for the dead. In Acts 22:16, Paul records his own baptism in water. This same Paul says in Ephesians 4:5 that there is

only one baptism. The fact that he submitted to water baptism immediately following his salvation, the fact that he teaches water baptism in his epistle, is indisputable proof that the one baptism is water baptism.

The one body into which the Corinthians are said in I Corinthians 12:13 to have been baptized was the local assembly at Corinth.

The one body referred to in I Corinthians 12:12-31 has members "more feeble" and "less honorable." The one body has "a schism" (verse 25); even those who hold to the invisible church theory would admit that there cannot be any schism in that. There is no invisible universal body. A body must have locality. A body cannot be disembodied.

The only references in the New Testament to a body of Christ are in the epistles written by Paul. The body is mentioned once in Romans (Rom. 12:4-5), three times in I Corinthians (I Cor. 10:17: 12:13; 12:27), six times in the book of Ephesians (Eph. 1:22-23: 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12; 4:16), and five time in Colossians (Col. 1:18; 1:24; 2:17; 2:19; 3:15). Some kind of a church is the body of Christ. In I Corinthians 12:27 Paul plainly says that the church at Corinth was a body of Christ.

All of the other references in I Corinthians cannot refer to anything but a local church. In Ephesians 4:12, 16, the body referred to is the local church. In Colossians 2:24 and 3:15, the body referred to is the local church. Because Paul says there is only one body, he must mean, in every usage of one body, the local assembly.

Water baptism admits one into the membership of a local church.⁸

H. Boyce Taylor, Sr. says this concerning ekklesia:

Scholars testify that ekklesia was never used in classic Greek except of an assembled or assembling body. The two essential ideas in the word ekklesia are assembly and organization.... The etymology of the word ekklesia makes it of necessity a local church. The grammatical construction of the passages where used cannot be twisted to mean anything but a local church. Both Hort and Harnack testify that historically the word ekklesia was never used of anything but a local church, until long after the close of the New Testament. So you are on safe ground, when you say that the church, which is the body of Christ, is always a local Baptist church.⁹

By one's New Testament Baptism he qualifies for church membership (Acts 2:41). The first church made baptism a condition of membership. Baptism is a symbol of union with Christ; it is a uniform act which all can do in exactly the same manner; it is the same for rich or poor, learned or unlearned, young or old. When all are united to Christ in His churches, then all are united with one another. In New Testament times this baptismal tie of brotherhood was received without delay after conversion. For a Christian to have continued unbaptized, or to have delayed the ordinance unnecessarily, was then unknown.¹⁰

The main scripture used to show baptism into church membership is Acts 2:41. E.H. Bancroft says that the following order is suggested in Acts 2:41: conversion, baptism, admission into church membership, orderly walk, observance of the Lord's Supper, and united prayer.¹¹ More testimony on this passage is given by George Hodges:

Baptism is the door into the church (Acts 2:41). A believer in the Lord Jesus

Christ is born of the Holy Spirit and has therefore a spiritual birth, being born into the Kingdom or the family of God, but added to the church as in the case of the afore stated scripture. When we refer to the church, we mean the local church, because there is no other kind of church.

Roy Mason says that Acts 2:41 shows the church existed before Pentecost. Since they were believers added by baptism, it is very evident that what they were added to was the church. He further states:

It is useless to argue that the three thousand were merely added to the ranks of believers and not to the church, for the same language is used in the 47th verse, where we are told that the "Lord added to them day by day those that were saved." None will deny that "them" in the 47th verse refers to the church.

Indeed, the Authorized Version translates "church" instead of "them."¹³

The following scriptures will back up Acts 2:41-42 as proof text for baptism into church membership: Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:12; Romans 6:1-4.

In I Corinthians 12:28 we are told that the apostles were first in the church. Luke 6:13 tells of their selection by Jesus and the names of the first apostles. In Acts 1:22, Luke tells us that a man could not be one of the twelve apostles unless he had accompanied with them from the baptism of the first Baptist preacher. The first church was built by Jesus, who was Himself baptized by a Baptist preacher. Its first members were baptized by this same first Baptist preacher.¹⁴ This clearly shows that the first members of the First Baptist Church of Jerusalem had all been baptized. Even more important is that they all had received scriptural baptism by John the Baptist.

Baptism was placed before the Supper in the Commission (Matthew 28:20). The apostles followed that order (Acts 2:41-42). The people to whom Paul was writing in I Corinthians 11, were the same ones spoken of in Acts 18:1-10.

Bible baptism is an initiatory rite. It pictures the beginning of the Christian life. The Supper pictures the nourishment of the spiritual life of the believer. That makes it necessary that baptism precede the Supper. True Baptists require Scriptural baptism before the invitation to the Lord's Supper.

Christ's Assembly is to judge those that are within, to discipline its own members, (I Corinthians 5:12). One Baptist Congregation cannot discipline a member of another Baptist Congregation. Each Assembly is independent of every other. Members of one Congregation cannot vote in another Congregation. Each Baptist Congregation is commanded to serve the Lord's Supper to its own members, over whom it has disciplinary authority. A restricted table is simple obedience to the Lord's command.¹⁵

The oldest articles of faith (A.D. 1120) state this concerning baptism:

We believe in the ordinance of baptism. The water is the visible, external, which represents to us that which, by virtue of God's invisible operation, is within us, viz: the renovation of our minds, and the mortification of our members through faith of Jesus Christ; and by this ordinance we are received into the holy congregation of God's people, previously professing and declaring

our faith and change of life.¹⁶

To accept one from a nonscriptural church into membership is to accept gross error into the assembly, the body of Christ. The place to stop heresy, error, and unsound doctrine from infiltrating the churches is at the entrance of the baptismal pool.¹⁷

As. Dr. S.E. Anderson states, "Church membership requires that each person be regenerated, and then baptized (Acts 2:41-47). This is known as regenerate church membership."¹⁸

Circumcision

Circumcision was for Jews only, for males only, and in the Old Testament only; while baptism is for every believer in Christ, whether Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female (Gal. 3:28). Christ made no reference to circumcision. The Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) said nothing about baptism taking the place of circumcision. The meanings of the two ceremonies are totally dissimilar, and any effort to link them is simply a desperate attempt to do away with the believer's burial-baptism. If the Word of truth is handled aright no one will mix Judaism with Christianity.¹⁹

Colossians 2:11-13 is said to link baptism with circumcision. T.G. Rooke says concerning this passage:

A Christian circumcision is 'made without hands,' therefore it cannot be water baptism. It implies faith, and a putting off the old carnal nature; therefore, it cannot be predicated of infants.... All the teachings of this passage is in favor of our doctrine, that a soul must be conscious of regeneration before it can ask the privilege of following Christ in His baptism ...Baptism avowedly sets forth truths in which infants can have no conscious participation. It implies in its recipients faith, repentance, the answer of a good conscience, deliberate acceptance of Christ as Savior and as an Exemplar of life. Surely the inference from these facts more than outweigh the amiable but legalist presumption that the Christian Church is, in outward things, a continuation of the Church of the Old Covenant.²⁰

Dr. A.H. Strong has an illuminating paragraph:

What takes the place of circumcision is not baptism but regeneration. Paul defeated the attempt to fasten circumcision on the church, when he refused to have that rite performed on Titus; E.G. Robinson: "Circumcision is not a type of baptism. 1. It is purely a gratuitous assumption that it is so. There is not a word of Scripture to authorize it. 2. Circumcision was a national, a theocratic, and not a personal, religious, rite. 3. If circumcision be a type, why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Why did he not explain, on an occasion so naturally calling for it, that circumcision was replaced by baptism?"²¹

Rebaptism

Some use Acts 18:25 and Acts 19:3-5 to show that John's baptism was not Christian baptism. However, these few disciples had never heard of the Holy Spirit and of the gospel. Paul had them properly baptized, not rebaptized.

Many Christians, having learned that their first so-called baptism was received while ignorant of salvation, have asked for real New Testament baptism after their conversion. Proper baptism need never be repeated any more than Calvary needs repetition, for the two are linked in meaning. But un-Scriptural "baptism" such as sprinkling, or infant baptism or an immersion received with a false hope in its saving efficacy, is not baptism at all.²²

Letters

When a Baptist Congregation receives a member by transfer of letter, actually the person is coming on profession of faith and baptism. The receiving Congregation is saying, "We believe you have been saved, and we believe you have been baptized as we ourselves would baptize you, if you came for baptism now." Real Baptist Congregations receive members only on a profession of faith and baptism. A letter or statement merely updates the profession and the observance of the ordinance.²³

CONCLUSION

Baptism is a part of a seven-fold unity, (Ephesians 4:4-6). It is the doorway into the earthly House of God. It is for the saved only. It is pre-requisite to the privilege of the Lord's Supper. It is not essential to salvation, but is essential to Christian obedience and reward. No believer is ever a fully obedient Christian without it. It has no purpose or meaning for the unsaved. It is not a saving ordinance, but an ordinance for the saved.²⁴

Footnotes:

¹I.M. Haldeman, The Truth About Baptism (Bristol: The Evangelistic Press, n.d.), pp. 15-17.

²James Hastings, Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, III (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 130-131.

³William Evans, The Great Doctrines of the Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1939), p. 186.

⁴J. Newton Brown, A Baptist Church Manual (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973).

⁵Haldeman, pp. 18-19.

⁶Dr. S.E. Anderson, The First Church (Little Rock: The Challenge Press, 1972), p. 24.

⁷Ibid, p. 23.

⁸J.H. Melton, The Law of Occlusion, pp. 9-14.

⁹H. Boyce Taylor, Sr., Why Be a Baptist? (Lexington: Ashland Avenue Baptist Publications, 1972), p. 47.

¹⁰Stanley Edwin Anderson, Your Baptism Is Important, p. 66.

- ¹¹E.H. Bancroft, Elemental Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 242.
- ¹²G. E. Hodges, The New Testament Church, Baptism, Lord's Supper, Pamphlet, n.p., n.d.
- ¹³Roy Mason, The Church That Jesus Built (Indianapolis: Bluff Avenue Baptist Church, n.d.), pp. 17-18.
- ¹⁴Taylor, p. 40.
- ¹⁵Frank A. Godsoe, The House of God - A Blood-Bought Body (Hawaii: Lanakila Baptist Press, 1973), pp. 143-144.
- ¹⁶J.R. Graves, Christian Baptism: The Profession of the Faith (Texarkana: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928), p. 18.
- ¹⁷Hodges, loc. cit.
- ¹⁸Dr. S.E. Anderson, The First Church, p. 24.
- ¹⁹Stanley Edwin Anderson, Your Baptism Is Important, p. 119.
- ²⁰T.C. Rooke, The Doctrine and History of Christian Baptism (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1894), pp. 42-45.
- ²¹A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1907),
- ²²Stanley Edwin Anderson, Your Baptism is Important, p. 139.
- ²³Godsoe, p. 135.
- ²⁴Frank A. Godsoe, The House of God: A Blood-Bought Body (Hawaii: Lanakila Baptist Press, 1973), p. 125.

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