

NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

"And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Mark 1:9-11.

In presenting the teachings of the Word of God concerning baptism, we must be frank, faithful and persistent. Thus far, in our studies together, we have discovered that baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon a profession of faith in Him as Saviour and Lord. No reputable scholar of any denomination will deny that New Testament baptism is immersion.

We also studied the question, "Why was the Lord Jesus baptized?" We discovered that He was baptized in the Jordan River to show forth His death, His burial and His resurrection. His obedient children are baptized for the same object that Christ Jesus was, namely, to picture His atoning work. Anything which does not portray the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is not baptism, no matter who may call it that. When our Lord was baptized, it was God's child being baptized, God's man doing the baptizing, God's method by which it was done, and God's purpose for which it was done.

I. Who Should Be Baptized?

We recognize that there has been endless controversy on the question as to who are the proper subjects of baptism. On this question the scriptures are very simple and plain. Only because of departure from the plain teaching of the Word of God on this subject, there has been some confusion in the minds of people. In this, as in all other religious matters, we accept the Word of God as the final authority.

Who, then, does the Bible say, should be baptized? Who is to be baptized, a believer or an unbeliever, a child of God or a follower of Satan? The answer is very plain. Any reader of the New Testament will observe that only believers in Christ are the proper subjects of baptism. The teaching of the New Testament is uniform on this subject.

In the Great Commission Christ said that we are to make disciples and then to baptize them. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matthew 28:19. They are to be baptized after they are saved, and never before. In every case of New Testament baptism salvation preceded the ordinance of baptism. "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.)" John 4:1-2. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Acts 2:41. Were those who were thus baptized and added to the church on the day of Pentecost believers or unbelievers, saved or unsaved? The answer is clear and unmistakable. They were saved. Concerning those Samaritans who heard Philip preaching, we are told, "But when they believed . . . they were baptized, both men and women." Acts 8:12. When Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch were riding along in the chariot, reading the scriptures and talking about them, "They came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Having been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, the eunuch was baptized.

Take the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Was he baptized before he was saved or after his salvation? Let the scriptures make answer. "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus,

that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." Acts 9:17-18. It is plain that Saul of Tarsus was a believer in Christ and a child of God before he was baptized by Ananias. What about the Philippian jailor? Let the Word of God speak. "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:29-31.

Always the scriptural order is salvation and then baptism and church membership. The New Testament indicates that baptism was administered only to those persons who had repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. In order for a baptism to be valid and scriptural the candidate must be a child of God. Otherwise, it cannot be baptism, even though it may be an immersion.

That the only proper subjects of New Testament baptism are persons who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour is supported by the very nature of the Christian religion and by the history of Christianity. The practice of restricting baptism to believers in Christ has always been a protest against the unscriptural dogma of baptismal regeneration and against the whole theory of sacramental grace. Since only those who can give credible evidence of regeneration are proper subjects for baptism, unaccountable infants and the unsaved are not qualified. Because believers only are commanded to be baptized, infants and any others who are unable to have moral judgments because of unsound mind cannot be baptized scripturally.

Believer's baptism puts the blood of Christ before the baptismal waters, regeneration before baptism, and Christ before the church. It emphasizes salvation by grace through faith, and not by works. This glorious doctrine is the one for which many of our forefathers were persecuted, cast into prison and burned at the stake.

II. Why Should Believers Be Baptized?

All men should repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation. And all believers in Christ are under obligation to obey their Lord's command to confess Him before men in baptism. No one who trusts Him for salvation can lightly esteem His authority, or willingly disregard His command to be baptized. It will never be wrong for one to insist on doing a thing as his Saviour did it and as He commanded it to be done.

Sometimes Baptists are accused of believing that nobody can be a Christian without being baptized. This charge is wholly without foundation in fact. How strange that this charge survives from generation to generation, notwithstanding the fact that no Baptist was ever heard to avow such a belief, and that no one who makes the charge ever heard it from Baptist lips, read it in a Baptist book, or saw it in a Baptist paper. Our contention has always been to the contrary, namely, that no ordinance has anything whatever to do with saving anybody. Baptism is not a means of salvation for any soul. It was never meant to save anybody. There are many Christians among the unbaptized. The scriptures do not teach that baptism has any saving efficacy, and for anyone to teach that it has is to rob the blood of Christ of its unique merit.

It is a fact to be deplored that multitudes of professing Christians regard baptism as a matter of little or no importance and decline to give it the consideration which it merits as an integral part of the New Testament. If the prominence given in the scriptures to any subject is a test of its importance, surely, the subject of baptism is in the estimate of the Holy Spirit an extremely important doctrine. No professing Christian should ever regard baptism as unimportant.

Why, then, should believers be baptized?

1. To do what Christ did.

That which Christ did should not be treated with indifference by anybody who pretends to be His follower. There is only one thing that a believer can do as perfectly as Christ did. He can't speak as He did for no man ever spake as our Lord. No man can live a sinless life as He lived. No man can perform the miracles which He did. But every believer can walk down into the baptismal waters and be buried in the likeness of his Lord's death and be raised in the likeness of His resurrection. Why should any believer in Christ hesitate to do what his Saviour did? His example was perfect, and therefore right for everybody whom He has saved. "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan." Mark 1:9.

2. To please God the Father.

"And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Mark 1:10-11. When our Saviour submitted to the beautiful ordinance of baptism, making it the initial act in His public ministry, the Heavenly Father declared His approval and expressed His pleasure. If we, who are His children, would grow in grace, and enjoy the smile of God's approval, our attitude to His Word and Will must never be that of choosing what we like and refusing what we do not like. It is wonderful to have the privilege of doing that which our Lord did and thereby please God in it. "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17.

3. To obey the command of Christ.

The most solemn, comprehensive and perpetual commission ever given by the Lord Jesus Christ is that recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:19-20.

This Great Commission makes it the imperative duty of every child of God to be baptized. Baptism is commended with emphasis, and enforced by recurring examples in the New Testament. All of the believers mentioned in the New Testament were baptized, except the thief who died on the cross without an opportunity to be baptized after Christ saved him. Baptism is obligatory on every child of God. Can one refuse that which Christ has commanded and at the same time call Him Lord? If one imagines that such a course is possible, Christ says to such a person, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke 6:46. Obedience to Christ is one of the laws of the Christian life, as well as one of the secrets of blessing.

4. To confess one's faith in Christ.

Enlightened people are not baptized in order to be saved. They know that baptism does not possess any magical power to convert and to save the soul. They know that baptism does not possess any power to remit sin, to change the heart, to save the soul, or to sanctify the spirit. They know that if baptism was essential to salvation, then the preacher would be as necessary as Christ. Intelligent and instructed people know that their salvation does not depend on water or any preacher. They know that if baptism is essential to salvation, then Jesus Christ never

saved anybody directly, because He never baptized anyone. If baptism is essential to salvation, then Paul misled the Philippian jailor, for he told him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and he would be saved. All of us know that baptism does not wash away sins, because we have known various people who were meaner after baptism than they were before. If it takes water to wash away sins, what about the sins committed between baptism and death? Isn't it strange that no one who is baptized to be saved claims to have an experience of grace or to be saved? Fortunately, many who formerly claimed that baptism is essential to salvation are now ashamed of the fact that they once believed that pernicious doctrine. At the same time they rejoice over the fact that they have come into the light and are rejoicing in God's truth. After all, if baptism is for the remission of sins, for what was Christ baptized?

5. To prove one's loyalty to Christ.

As an act of obedience to Christ, the reception of baptism brings joy, satisfaction and comfort to the soul. The believer feels that in baptism he has come out openly before the world and committed himself to Christ for definite Christian service. This gives to the spirit a moral triumph and fills it with boundless peace. Baptism is the announcement to the world that the recipient considers himself dead to his old life of sin and that henceforth he expects to live a genuine Christian life. To be baptized is to acknowledge Christ's leadership, to enter His army, to swear allegiance to Him as Lord and Master in a reverent and public manner.

No professed Christian has any right to regard baptism as unimportant. Christ explicitly declared that by baptism man should confess Him as Saviour and Lord. To indicate that this ordinance is not important is to assert that disobedience to Christ is permissible and that a witnessing faith is not essential. Our blessed Lord said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." John 14:15. "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." John 14:21. "In the keeping of His commandments there is great reward."

Baptism is a test of loyalty to Christ. Loyalty to Christ requires that we obey His commandments. This forbids our setting them aside for convenience, for personal comfort, or to please others.

A little sick child, desiring to be baptized, said, "Mother, I hope I won't die tonight." "Why?" inquired the mother. The child replied, "Because I haven't been baptized." "Do you think baptism will save you?" asked the mother. "Oh, no," said the child, "I am already saved, for I am trusting in Jesus, but I wouldn't like to go to heaven without doing what the Lord told me to do." Why should anybody want to go to heaven without doing what the Lord Jesus Christ told him or her to do?

6. To dramatize the gospel of Christ.

Our Saviour was baptized to picture His atoning work. Baptism represents Christ's death and burial for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead for our justification. The gist of the gospel of Christ is that He died for our sins, was buried and rose again. The child of God dramatizes this gospel in his baptism. Death, burial and resurrection are dramatized by the believer in his baptism. The Christian symbolizes his death to sin when he goes under the water and his rising to walk in newness of life when he comes up out of the water. Thus, we can proclaim the gospel in action as well as in speech.