

NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

"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 alway, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:19-20.

Of the two ordinances which Christ commanded His churches to observe until He returns, baptism comes first.

I. What Is The Meaning Of Baptism?

Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon a profession of faith in Him as Saviour and Lord.

II. Why Was The Lord Jesus Christ Baptized?

As certainly as anything ever took place, Jesus Christ was immersed in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. When He requested John the Baptist to baptize Him, he shrank from administering the ordinance. He protested, saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" To the objection of John the Baptist Christ made the following reply: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." In this picture of subjection, death, burial and resurrection "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." This righteousness was to be fulfilled by his death, burial and resurrection. In His baptism Christ could show how He would fulfill it in His death. When He was baptized at the beginning of His ministry, He showed in figure what He would do at the close of that ministry in fact. In His baptism was the form--He was buried as dead. In the end there was the reality--He was buried, being dead. In His baptism He rose from the emblematic grave. In His resurrection He rose from the dead. Jesus Christ was baptized in Jordan to show forth His death, His burial and His resurrection. His obedient and loving children are baptized for the same object that Christ was, namely, to picture His atoning work. Anything which does not portray the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is not New Testament baptism.

When Jesus Christ 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. His baptism was intended to be for all times the example and pattern of those who should become members of His churches.

III. Who Should Be Baptized?

On this question the scriptures are very simple and plain. Any reader of the New Testament will observe that only believers in Christ are the proper subjects of baptism. Christ commanded the making of disciples and then the baptizing of them. People are to be baptized after they are saved, and never before. In every case of New Testament baptism salvation preceded the ordinance of baptism. 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 baptism to be scriptural the candidate must be a child of God. Otherwise, it cannot be baptism, even though it may be an immersion.

IV. Why Should All Believers Be Baptized?

Believers in Christ cannot be obedient to Christ unless they follow Him in baptism. No Christian should ever regard baptism as unimportant. For anybody to say that baptism is a matter of little consequence is to dispute the Word of God.

Why should all believers be baptized?

1. To do what Christ did.
His example was perfect. Therefore, it is right for everybody whom He has saved.
2. To please God the Father.
What a privilege it is to do that which our Lord Jesus did and thereby please God the Father.
3. To obey the command of Christ.
The Great Commission, as spoken by Christ, makes it the imperative duty of every child of God to be baptized. Baptism is commanded with emphasis, and enforced by recurring examples in the New Testament.
4. To confess one's faith in Christ.
5. To prove one's loyalty to Christ.
To be baptized is to acknowledge Christ's leadership, to enter His army, and to swear allegiance to Him as Lord and Master. Baptism is a test of loyalty to Christ. If we are loyal to Him, we will be obedient to Him.
6. To dramatize the gospel of Christ.
The death, burial and resurrection of Christ are dramatized by the believer in his baptism. The Christian also 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.

V. Who Should Baptize?

Some ask, "Does it make any difference as to the administrator?" Christ must have thought it made a lot of difference or He never would have traveled sixty miles over dusty roads from Nazareth to Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist.

The administration of baptism is not committed to the world. No sane person would contend that the world has been made the custodian of an ordinance appointed by Him whose "kingdom is not of this world." The administration of baptism has not been committed to those who have not been baptized themselves. There is no scriptural authority for the administration of baptism by an unbaptized man.

In giving the command to baptize Christ designated the one who was to perform this ordinance. That responsibility rests upon a church and that alone. It was to the church that Christ gave the ordinance. "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 28:20. He did not give this commission to individuals, but to the church. I would not administer baptism for anybody without being authorized by a church to do so. To whom did Christ give the ordinance of baptism, to the individual or to the church? All know that Christ gave the ordinance to His church. Christ prescribed the administrator, which is a New Testament church. The man who administers the ordinance of baptism for a church should be a saved man, a baptized man, a member of a church of like faith and order, a man called of God to the gospel ministry, a man who has been ordained for this and other specific purposes.

VI. Why Do We Not Accept Alien Immersion?

1. It is unscriptural.
It is unscriptural in that it sets aside the authority of the one institution to which Jesus Christ committed the ordinance of baptism. The scriptures make it very plain that Christ gave the ordinance of baptism to His church, and not to His disciples as mere individuals. After giving the command to baptize believers or disciples, Christ added, "and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world." Could He be with those disciples, who soon would die, to the end of the

age? Of course not! As individuals they would not live that long. Indeed, all of them have been dead for centuries. Then, it follows that Christ did not give the command to baptize to the disciples as individuals, but to His church, an institution to which He had already promised perpetuity throughout the age. To no other institution, organization, or anything else did He ever give any authority to baptize. So then, baptism is not an individual ordinance, but a church ordinance. Alien immersion is unscriptural.

Nothing renders baptism more unscriptural than for its administration to be without proper authority. Anyone ought to be able to see this. To illustrate, Suppose I could secure a printing press that would exactly duplicate United States currency. Would money issued by me be acceptable? Certainly not. The paper might be alright, the ink might be alright, but certainly there would be one thing wrong. What? Why, I have no authority to print and send forth paper money. Money that is not authorized by the United States government is counterfeit. Baptism that is not administered by the divinely constituted authority is counterfeit.

2. It is inconsistent.

To receive alien immersion is to reverse the Baptist position of many centuries. It is to throw aside the teachings of our Baptist ancestors for which, according to history, more than fifty million have been put to death by martyrdom. To accept alien immersion would be to place ourselves in the position of being just another sect. Alien immersion is the mother of a whole brood of heresies. It always makes for confusion and trouble in a church.

Acts 19:1-5 tells us about twelve men who were baptized for the wrong purpose. Someone over in Palestine had been baptized by John the Baptist and had come to Ephesus and without any authority at all had administered baptism to these twelve. These men thought that baptism was the main thing. They had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. They were not proper subjects for baptism, for they had not received the Holy Spirit. When Paul came by and explained to them the error of their baptism, and taught them their need of Christ, and led them to trust Him as their Saviour, then they were baptized. Without a murmur or complaint they were immersed for the second time. Immersion can be repeated; baptism cannot. It takes far more than an immersion to make a baptism. It takes a qualified subject, a saved person; a qualified administrator, one who is acting under the authority of a New Testament church; and a right motive and design, a love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to glorify Him, by being buried with Him in the likeness of His death and being raised with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. The fact that these twelve men had not been saved made void the whole performance.

VII. What Constitutes Scriptural Baptism?

1. The proper authority--Christ.

The authority for baptism is Christ. He is the One Who issued the great command which includes the statement, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Christ is the authority for baptism. When a church receives a candidate for baptism and instructs her pastor to administer the ordinance, she is simply expressing her belief in the fitness of the person to be baptized on the basis of his testimony that he is a saved person, and the willingness of the church to receive such an one into her fellowship.

2. The proper administrator--the church.

Only churches organized according to the pattern found in the New Testament

and believing and practicing the same things which the New Testament churches did are proper administrators of the church ordinances.

3. The proper subject--a believer in Christ.
In the Great Commission Christ commanded His church to make disciples and then to baptize them. The only proper subject for baptism is a believer in Christ or a child of God. Unless this is true of the candidate an immersion is not a baptism.
4. The proper act--immersion.
No honest and reputable scholar in the world will deny that baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ. Anything less than that cannot picture a burial and a resurrection. Sometimes a person will say something about the different forms of baptism, when as a matter of fact there is only one form mentioned in the Word of God, and, besides, the word itself has one meaning. To call something else baptism does not make it that.
5. The proper formula--"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This was the formula that Christ gave in the Great Commission. Believing that God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit have distinctive parts in the salvation of the sinner, it would be rebellion not to baptize the saved person in the name of the Trinity.
6. The proper design--a burial with Christ.
It is not the purpose of baptism to bring one into the position of the saved. Baptism does not procure salvation, but it pictures it. New Testament baptism has a two-fold symbolism. It symbolizes Christ's death, burial and resurrection for sinful men, and the death of the believer to sin, his burial of the old life of sin, and his resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

Anything which does not include these six elements is not New Testament baptism. Accepting these plain New Testament teachings and practicing them will automatically do away with all unscriptural practices and be a great blessing to any Christian, as well as any New Testament church.