

NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. 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 3:13-17.

There are two ordinances in a New Testament church--baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are church and not kingdom ordinances. They are symbolic and not sacramental. They are declarative and not procurative. They are symbols picturing the great doctrines of salvation and not sacraments securing salvation. They are to be administered on the authority of a New Testament church. Their divine purpose is to express vividly the fundamental facts of the gospel and confirm them to the believers. These two ordinances were given to the church by the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose of keeping before the world the great facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and as witnesses to the death to sin and the resurrection to a new life of those in Christ. Of the two ordinances which Christ commanded His church to observe until He returns, baptism comes first.

I. What Is The Meaning Of Baptism?

Baptism is not found in the Old Testament. Neither is it a substitute for anything in the Old Testament. There is nothing like baptism in any pagan religion. There is no teaching on the subject until the beginning of the Christian era.

I trust that all are aware that the New Testament was written in the Greek language. The word baptizo, which is used in the Greek New Testament, means to dip, to plunge, or to immerse. One does not have to be a Greek scholar to know that much. No reliable Greek lexicon gives any other meaning for baptizo than dip or immerse. No instance has ever been found in any Greek writing where baptizo means sprinkle or pour; it always means dip or immerse. The word which means to immerse never means to pour or sprinkle. The word which means to pour never means to immerse or to sprinkle. The word meaning to sprinkle never means to immerse or to pour. In the Greek language neither of these words is ever confused with another in its meaning or application.

I assume that you know that the King James version of the Bible appeared in 1611, when King James was head of the church of England. The King James version is the work of scholars in the church of England. These scholars were members of a church that practiced sprinkling. It would have been embarrassing to them and to their church to have translated the word baptizo. So, when they came to the word, baptizo, they agreed that they would not translate it, but simply transliterate or Anglicize it. This they did by the change of the letter "o" into "e", or by carrying the word out of one language into another. They were not willing to let the Bible say what God had said in it. Had they dared translate the word "baptizo", they would have been compelled to translate it "immerse" or "dip".

Great violence is done to the Greek language by any person who attempts to represent baptism as being anything except immersion.

As to the meaning of baptism, let me give you the testimony of only those who are not Baptists.

On page 317 of "Faith of Our Fathers" by Cardinal Gibbons, a Roman Catholic, we read:

"For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity, Baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century, the practice of baptism by infusion has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attained with less inconvenience than by immersion."

Brenner, another Roman Catholic said:

"For thirteen hundred years baptism was an immersion in water."

John Wesley, a great Methodist, in commenting on Romans 6:4 in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, page 376, said:

"We are buried with him--alluding to the ancient manner of baptism by immersion."

George Whitefield, another Methodist, said:

"It is certain that the words of our text (Romans 6:4) is an illusion to the manner of baptism by immersion."

In his Commentary on Mark, E. P. Gould, an Episcopalian, said:

"The preposition here coincides with the proper meaning of the verb, indicating that the form of the rite was immersion in the stream."

Dean Stanley, an Episcopalian, said:

"For the first thirteen centuries the almost universal practice of baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament and which is the very meaning of the word baptize, that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed into the water. The change from immersion to sprinkling has set aside the larger part of the apostolic language regarding baptism and has altered the very meaning of the word."

Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran Church said:

"Baptism is that dipping into water, since it takes its name from the Greek, to baptize, signifying to dip, and baptism is a dipping. Baptism requires two things--death and resurrection. I could wish that the baptized should be totally immersed, according to the meaning of the word, and the signification of the mystery; not that I think it necessary to do so, but that so complete and perfect a thing as baptism should also be completely and perfectly expressed by the sign." Vol. 6, pp. 218-219, "History of Christian Church" by Philip Schaff.

Dr. Philip Schaff, great historian (Lutheran), said:

"Immersion, and not sprinkling, was unquestionably the original normal form (of baptism). This is shown by the meaning of the Greek work and the analogy of the baptism of John, which was performed in Jordan." "History of the Apostolic Church, page 568.

In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin, the great Presbyterian, said:

"That the baptism of John was by plunging the body seems to appear from the things that are related of him: namely, that he baptized in Jordan, that he baptized in Aenon because there was much water there."

When these great men, to whose interest it was to find sprinkling or pouring in the New Testament, admit that it could not be found there, the admission is convincing evidence of the truth of immersion.

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 Baptized?

The baptism of our blessed Lord is described in five passages: Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:12. As certainly as anything ever took place, Jesus Christ was immersed in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

Our Saviour left the scenes of His childhood and youth, and travelled, doubtless alone, the long journey from Nazareth to Jordan. When He asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, he shrank from administering the ordinance. He felt his personal unworthiness to do so. He protested saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" John the Baptist objected because of all that is implied in baptism. The ordinance of baptism implies repentance--a renunciation of an old life which the baptized person condemns, and of which he is ashamed. It also implies an entrance upon an entirely new life.

John's baptism was unto repentance. The people were baptized confessing their sins, but baptism could not have any such significance to Christ. He did not have any sins to confess, and deeds of guilt for which to repent. He did not have any evil life to renounce. No thought even verging on sin ever originated or was harbored in His soul. He knew no sin.

To the objection of John the Baptist Christ Jesus made the following reply: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." How gentle those words! Permit it at this time, at this period of My ministry! Permit it "now" at the threshold of My public ministry! "Thus--in this manner--in this picture of subjection, death, burial and resurrection--"it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." All righteousness was what the moral law demanded. All righteousness was what the sinner needed. All righteousness was what Christ came to fulfill. To bring an everlasting righteousness was His mission to earth. But how was this righteousness to be fulfilled? It was by His death, burial and resurrection.

In what way, then, could His baptism fulfill all righteousness? In His baptism He could show how He would fulfill it in His death. At the beginning of His public ministry, as He entered upon that pathway which must end in sacrificial death, He could show how He was going to fulfill all that righteousness which God's law demands, all that righteousness which condemned sinners need, and all that righteousness which will entitle to endless citizenship in the realms of purity and glory. 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. The waves that flowed over His head in the Jordan River pictured the waves of sorrow and blood which rolled over that same blessed head on Calvary. His baptism showed how He would work out an everlasting righteousness for all who believe by dying, by being buried, and by rising from the grave. That is the meaning of His sublime words. Therefore, Jesus Christ was baptized or submerged in Jordan to show forth His death, His burial and His resurrection. Baptism is God's chosen symbol of the most wonderful fact in all the universe. His obedient children are baptized for the same object that Christ Jesus was, namely, to picture His atoning work. To change the ordinance is to destroy its meaning. Anything which does not portray the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is not baptism. Scriptural

baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This beautiful ordinance steadfastly keeps before people the fact of the vicarious and substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

Christ's baptism was intended to be for all times the example and pattern of those who should become members of His churches. His baptism had four characteristics:

1. He was baptized as God's child.
"This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."
2. He was baptized by God's man.
"There was a man sent from God."
3. He was baptized in God's way.
"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water."
"And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him."
4. He was baptized for God's purpose.
"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." "Thus" means in this manner.
If one loves Christ as he should, he will not refuse or hesitate to obey Him.

When Jesus 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.