

Baptism
in
the Book
of
Acts

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1. INTRODUCTION

It should not come as any surprise that a person who grew up in Christian Churches and Churches of Christ should be interested in the topic of baptism. I readily admit that I have a built-in bias almost from birth. I was reared to believe certain things about baptism so objectivity may be at a premium, but I have tried to be fair in my approach to this long debated issue.

One thing I must confess is a high view of Scripture both in its reliability and its position in deciding what we should believe about anything connected to the Church and her practices. While reading an online devotion by John R. W. Stott (1982:115) recently, I ran across what I wish I could have said:

When Scripture and tradition are in collision, we must allow Scripture to reform tradition, just as Jesus insisted with the ‘traditions of the elders’ (cf. Mk. 7:1-13). If the Church of Rome were to have the courage to renounce unbiblical traditions..., immediate progress would be made towards agreement under the Word of God.

Much of my life, those of us in the Restoration Movement have been accused of being “baptismal regenerationists”. I do not believe nor do I know a lot of people who believe that baptism saves in and of itself. There is only One who saves, and that is our Savior, Jesus Christ. While elevating Jesus, however, I do not want to make light of baptism. In fact, I do not want to make light of anything our Lord has commanded. A case could be made, if we isolate scripture texts, that people can be saved by hearing, repenting, confessing, or any number of singular actions. Many times the biblical writers would not include every step. Some things can be assumed. Other times, circumstances are different requiring a different approach.

A story that was adapted from some writings by Alexander Campbell in *The Christian System* has helped explain my personal position over the years. The story I first read in a document by John Hendee (1984:59-60).

It is called *The Sinking Ship*.

A ship is sinking. A father hears the cries of the men on board. He sends his son in a small boat to rescue the sailors. The son rows out. He calls to the dying men, ‘Hold on to the oar. I will pull you into my boat.’ The sailors hear. They believe the son can help them. They obey his instructions. They grasp the oar held by the son. They are saved. What saved the men? The father who saw and had mercy? The instructions to the son? The son’s willingness to go? The small boat? The shouts? The oars? The grasping? What would you like to leave out? the boat?

We need to be careful that we follow *all* of Jesus' commands as given in the Bible as to how we might be saved. We need to know exactly the same thing as those early inquirers who said: "Brothers, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)?

Let us investigate together some of the issues.

2. ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

i. Old Testament Lustrations

Certainly within the Old Testament there are to be found similarities to Christian baptism. We must look at the usage of the words connected to baptism such as baptw, baptizw and bapto.

“Thirteen of the sixteen times in which baptw is used in the LXX it is a translation of Hebrew...which normally means ‘to dip’” (Averbeck 2 1981:270). The verb generally means to dip into some kind of liquid whether that be blood (Ex. 12:22) or water (Nu. 19:18) or some other material like oil (Deut. 33:24), or honey (I Sam. 14:27). The word that is used in the account about Naaman (II Ki. 5) is “dipped” (ebaptisato). He “dipped” himself seven times in the Jordan. This may also reflect the method of baptism in correlation with the translation. Lev. 11:32 may be translated literally “brought into the water” by eis udwr bafhsetai. The word also sometimes carries the meaning of overwhelm (Isa. 21:4).

There are references in the Apocrypha (Jdt. 12:7 and Sir. 31 (34):25) which talk of a cleansing in relationship to levitical impurity.

Cottrell says, “Baptism for the forgiveness of sins in the Christian age is not without antecedents in the previous era. It was foreshadowed by the Old Testament ritual purification ceremonies, also called lustrations or washings” (1989:55-56).

“After all of this, it is clear that baptism as an initiatory rite is not found in the OT or apocrypha, though ritual cleansing by immersion is present” (Averbeck 2 1981:272). Water was used for ritual purification, but it took a sacrifice for the purpose of cleansing from sin. It is not always easy to make clear lines between Old and New Testament practices, but it seems clear that Christian Baptism does not have its beginnings (in practice) in the Old Testament.

ii. Qumran Community

Even though John the Baptist is sometimes put in the company of the Essenes (Qumran community), there are certainly some real differences as to the practice of baptism. In the Qumran community there seems to be a waiting period of two years before anyone would be baptized into the community. This was a two-stage probationary period. Every effort was made to check the moral seriousness of the candidate. This was done so as not to bring ritual defilement on the community later. Baptism was by water, and immersion was the method. It also appears that baptism was self-administered.

iii. Jewish Proselyte Baptism

In Rabbinic writings the reception of proselytes was done through a rite that had three parts to it: “circumcision, baptism and the offering of a sacrifice in the temple” (Kuhn 1968 6:738). Certainly as Kuhn mentions, proselyte baptism was both a practice and a requirement for those wishing to be cleansed of their cultic impurities.

Solomon Zeitlin does not see proselyte baptism happening until after 65 A.D (Averbeck 2 1981:273). He wrote:

Immersion for proselytes was not instituted as a ritual *per se* for converts to Judaism. It became a requirement for proselytes for another reason. At the Conclave in the year 65 C.E. it was decreed that all gentiles are *ipso facto* unclean, in the category of a *zab*. In consequence of this decree any gentile who wished to enter the Jewish community had to undergo the ritual of immersion.

It was thought to be a common practice by 90 A.D. There is disagreement among scholars though as to which came first: proselyte baptism or Christian baptism. Most would agree that proselyte baptism is certainly a development from other ritual washings and lustrations, but goes beyond the outward physical cleansing. Averbeck does well in presenting both sides of the argument. Edersheim was convinced “the logical need of purification for the heathen upon entering the services of the sanctuary are conclusive proof that the proselyte baptism of Judaism was instituted before John the Baptist” (Averbeck 2 1981:274). Others like Oepke, however, think it totally inconceivable that Jewish ritual would be patterned after anything Christians did that was unique, especially after the fall of Jerusalem. John’s baptism would have differed from proselyte baptism in that John would have baptized only Jews while proselytes were Gentiles.

iv. John the Baptist’s Baptism

Boussett “spoke of Christian baptism as a sacramental act that arose out of analogous initiation rites within Hellenistic mystery cults. That view, however, has now widely been put to rest” (Hultgren 1994 XIV:6-7).

John's baptism could be distinguished "from other ritual baths and washings in that the one most likely underwent it but once and did not perform the rite on oneself but received the baptism passively" (ABD Hartman 1992 1:584). In the Qumran community baptism was self-administered.

More than likely Christian baptism finds its origin in John's baptism of repentance and its preparation for the soon-coming Messiah. In Acts 19:1-7 there seems to be a clear distinction between John's baptism and Christian baptism. The distinction being that with Christian baptism comes the Holy Spirit. Both baptisms required faith in the Messiah and repentance. Also "the Johannine rite was proleptic, whereas the Christian rite looks back to the accomplished work of Christ" (Parratt 1968:183). Both rites were considered eschatological in nature.

"As Paul's corrective steps show (Acts 19:4-6), these disciples like Apollos, are at best nominal Christians, and at worst simply disciples of John. In either case, they are living without either the truth or the power of the Christian gospel" (Larkin 1995:273). Marshall makes a case for this varied nature of reception of the Holy Spirit and baptism to be as it was in Acts. He says, "the chronological relation of the gift of the Spirit to the actual rite (i.e. Christian baptism) is unimportant" (1989:307). In today's Church that need not be. Teaching should always precede commitment.

It is also assumed that many of Jesus' disciples were baptized by John. Even Jesus had been baptized by John (Matt. 3:13, Mk. 1:9, Lk. 3:21, Jn. 1:26ff.). Once Pentecost initiated the church age with the Spirit, John's baptism was obsolete. After that there is no such thing as an unimmersed Christian. Every effort is made in the biblical record to baptize those who are ready, i.e who understand, so as to bring them into the Church.

3. CHRISTIAN BAPTISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

i. Baptism Referenced in the Primary Text

The most important word used in the New Testament for our discussion is baptizw. It is used 77 times in the New Testament, 21 times alone in the book of Acts (DeGruyter 1985). Wherever baptisma is used in Acts it seems to refer to John the Baptist's baptism. The word's (baptizw) meaning from the lexicons is clear. There is no misunderstanding possible if we look at the literal meaning of the word. All of the most respected lexicographers agree on the meaning. It clearly means to dip or immerse as stated in the Greek-English Lexicon produced by

Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker (BAGD 1979:131). Baptw is even used as a technical term for dying cloth (BAGD 1979:133). Liddell and Scott (1888) also agree the word means to dip in or under something (so this is not a new innovation or idea), as does Moulton and Milligan (1985) who look at other non-biblical sources. Even there, the word means submerged, flooded or overwhelmed. Colin Brown joins the group, and the list goes on.

The following texts in the book of Acts use the word baptizw and are the primary pericopes dealing with this practice: Acts 1:5 (twice); 2:38, 41; 8:12, 13, 16, 36, 38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 11:16 (twice); 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:3-5; and 22:16. There certainly are other verses which may allude to baptism without using the technical word, but these would be the important narratives depicting conversions in the book.

Quoting Dale, Reese (1986:75) says:

The word “baptize” means immerse in the original. One may ask any Greek working in this country and learn this simple fact. The Greek Catholic church has always known this fact and still practices immersion to this day. Jesus walked about sixty-five miles to be immersed in the Jordan River. John baptized at Aenon because there was “much” water there (John 3:23). Philip took the eunuch “down into the water” and both of them “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38, 39).

To claim somehow that John the Baptist or Philip went down into the water to pour water on the candidate is more about pet theology and ancient art than etymology or a correct understanding of what really must have happened.

ii. Similarities in Baptismal Records

No one that I am aware of would say that faith was not required for conversion (meaning to become a Christian). This is true even if it were only the faith of the adults (or sponsors) in a family with infants. Typically within the biblical record, in fact I know of no exception, “faith comes by hearing” Larkin says, “The kerygma, indeed, has the power to evoke that which it celebrates (Willimon 1988:36)” (1995:60). We can see from Acts 8:12-13 that believing Philip is the same as believing his message (also s. 16:34, 18:8).

Repentance may not always be stated as clearly as it is in Acts 2:38, but it is certainly implied. People do not make life-changing decisions without a “change of mind,” literally what metanoia means.

Confession is a part of both the text and tradition of the early church. “The church would continue to use the outward form of his water baptism as a confession of the name of Jesus on entry into the community of believers (2:38a)” (Polhill 1992:83). I have personally seen candidates in some groups today have the newly baptized (who are still in the baptistry) say, “Jesus is Lord”. What a wonderful testimony to the truth of what has happened!

Baptism is administered as soon as possible once these first responses to the Gospel can be validated.

Baptism in water never seems to be an option, but a requirement.

The receipt of the Holy Spirit and the promise of forgiveness for sin seem to follow on the prerequisites being in place. “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). “Although the Spirit cannot be tied to a mechanistic pattern, these patterns show that repentance and the gift of the Spirit are essential to the conversion experience” (Polhill 1992:83).

iii. Differences in Baptismal Records

If there are any differences, much could be attributed to the different audiences with different informational needs. Also the conversion accounts are with people displaying various degrees of faith which require appropriate approaches.

Certainly there is a variation in the record as to when the Holy Spirit becomes involved in conversions. Polhill says, “The Spirit cannot be tied down to a set pattern. Clearly, however, both baptism and receipt of the Spirit are normative to the experience of becoming a Christian believer” (1992:117). Generally, though, baptism and the reception of the Spirit are closely linked. In the case of the Samaritan church the Spirit is withheld until it can be declared legitimate and sanctioned by the Apostles (Conzelmann 1987:65). Haenchen is wrong in jumping to the conclusion that speaking in tongues being absent in this experience meant the Holy Spirit was as well (1971:304). This is an exception and certainly not normative. In fact, most conservative commentators (Stott 1990:157) would believe that a person could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (as he suggests the Samaritans had) without demonstrating miraculous gifts. I know that was my experience.

Some commentators would suggest that in Acts 2:41 it would have been impossible to accommodate the hearing of the apostles in such a large crowd. Haenchen and Dibelius feel hearing for such a large crowd would have been a significant problem. Longenecker tells us “Recent acoustical tests in Palestine, however, have shown that such features as sound reflection and ambient noise levels would have allowed biblical preachers to address large audiences, at least in certain locations” (Longenecker 1981 9:287). They also say it would have been impossible to baptize 3000 people due to time and water supply. All these objections can be answered (also see Marshall, p.82). Anyone concerned about crowd control and whether this would have been a problem for the Romans must understand the population and the increased numbers there for Pentecost. Jeremias estimated the population of Jerusalem to be as much as 95,000 swelling to 180,000 during pilgrim festivals (Jeremias 1969:83). The temple area is said to have been able to hold up to 200,000 worshippers.

This passage in Acts 8, regarding what some call the Samaritan Pentecost, is not a proof text for the controversial practice of confirmation. Larkin says, “If God had not withheld his Spirit until the Jerusalem apostles came, converts on both sides of the cultural barrier might have found Christ without finding each other” (1995:128). Crouch crudely calls it a “validation of half-breeds” (1974:99). Even those who practice confirmation cannot agree on how it should be done, and with good reason. Confirmation has no scriptural basis. “The picture of apostles scurrying hither and thither up and down the eastern end of the Mediterranean in an attempt to keep up with the rapid expansion of the Christian gospel, with little time for anything but “confirmation services”, is amusing but incredible” (Stott 1990:157).

The laying on of hands had different purposes for different occasions. Sometimes it was for setting people apart (Acts 6:6), healing (Acts 9:12), and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-19 and 19:6). The laying on of hands was not done in every case for the Holy Spirit to come on the people. It did not happen at Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2), nor did it happen with the Gentile Pentecost in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10:44).

The Spirit was given to Cornelius, et.al. (Acts 10) so that the Apostle Peter and those with him would not withhold water baptism. It was a sign of the gentile’s legitimate acceptance into the Body of Christ.

There are a number of different accounts of baptisms within the book of Acts. The variations that exist have plausible explanation in my opinion. Half the letters that the Apostle would pen do not mention baptism. Should we assume from that Paul did not feel baptism was important? Of course not!

Baptism is something which is important. The Ethiopian official recognized this when he said, “Look here is water, Why shouldn’t I be baptized” (Acts 8:37)? Also in the account of Cornelius, a similar question is posed. This time from the Apostle Peter we hear, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water” (Acts 10:47)? Munck puts it this way, “Following Philip’s explanation, the Ethiopian’s baptism took place in just as surprising a hurry as that of the prison guard in Philippi (xvi 25ff.); Cornelius’ (ch. x) and Paul’s baptism (ix 18; cf. xxii 16) could also be mentioned in this connection” (1981:79). We most assuredly are receiving from Luke telescoped stories, i.e. compressed versions of what were fuller dialogs. No one should baptize a candidate before there is faith and understanding of what is required to follow Jesus. Jesus called it “counting the cost” (Luke 14:28ff). And no one should think because it is not mentioned explicitly that the Ethiopian convert did not receive the Holy Spirit (Kistemaker 1990:320). If we use this rule, i.e. an *argument from silence*, the Apostle Paul also appears to not receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:19a). This seems not only unlikely, but impossible. Munck says, “such repetitions are not necessary” (1981:82). “Apparently it was in his baptism that Saul received the Spirit” (Gaertner 1993:158).

Because of the significant discussions regarding household conversions especially in Acts 10 and 16, I will

cover that under *candidates for baptism* in more detail.

Household conversions were certainly a part of what we see in Acts. Men and women of position, importance and probably some affluence making decisions for Jesus. “Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). It is never the other way as it is practiced in some Christian churches where baptism is administered in the hope that the infant will some day come to faith. When leaders of groups, organizations and even families can be won, many times they will influence others over time. The tense of the verbs here imply an ongoing process (Reese 1986:644).

Acts 19:3-5 is certainly another exceptional case, not the normal encounter of an evangelist. Although this may be representative of other such cases that must have come up. There is a discussion as to whether these “disciples” (maqhtai) were in fact Christians. Beasley-Murray states that because “in all the other thirty instances of the word occurring in Acts it means Christian disciples, it is often urged that they were Christians” (1962:109). There is no need to discount Scripture and its veracity at this point so as to keep a theological perspective intact. These disciples of John were rebaptized not because they had not been immersed, but that they had not been immersed into Christ. Because they had not received Christian baptism, they also obviously had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:5-6). There is no such thing as an unimmersed Christian, nor a Christian who does not have (know relationally) the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). Stott concludes, “The norm of Christian experience, then, is a cluster of four things: repentance, faith in Jesus, water baptism and the gift of the Spirit” (1990:305).

Each example of conversion in the book of Acts meets a different group of needs. Each approaches the gospel from their own individual vantage point. Some like the Philippian jailor might not have known much about God or Jesus while Cornelius may have had a solid background from which to make a decision to accept the Gospel.

(iv) A Discussion of Acts 2:38

No other text in Acts has produced more dialog than Acts 2:38. Let’s look at some of the issues in the text. “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

Much of the difficulty with this important verse is brought to the table of discussion because of theological bias. Quite a number of people believe that the small Greek word *eis* should be translated in this verse “*because of the forgiveness of sins.*” They would say that forgiveness follows repentance, not baptism. Reese lets us know that many Greek lexicons “do not even give a causal use for *eis* (because out of 1773 occurrences of *eis* in the New

Testament, only 4 might mean ‘because’)” (1986:77). These “faith-only” commentators unlink repent *and* be baptized because there is a suspected problem in agreement of number and person with the imperatives. It involves the “rule of concord.”

Camp (1997 1:42) tells us:

Since *ekastos* (translated *each*) can serve as the antecedent of a plural pronoun, McIntyre’s reliance on the rule of concord to separate baptism and forgiveness in Acts 2:38 is misguided. Indeed, virtually all scholars acknowledge some kind of linkage between the two in the verse.”

J.R. Mantey argues for a causal understanding of *eis* in Acts 2:38 based on an understanding while leaving the door open a crack to allow for a purpose clause, i.e. “baptism for the remission of sin.” Here is what Mantey says (1955:104):

When one considers in Ac. 2:38 repentance as self-renunciation and baptism as a public expression of self-surrender and self-dedication to Christ, which significance it certainly had in the first century, the expression *eis afesin twm amartiwn umwn* may mean *for the purpose of the remission of sins*. But if one stresses baptism, without its early Christian import, as a ceremonial means of salvation, he does violence to Christianity as a whole, for one of its striking distinctions from Judaism and Paganism is that it is a religion of salvation by faith while others teach salvation by works.

R. Marcus disagrees (Davis 1997 1:82) with Mantey. He says, “if Mantey is right to interpret these passages ‘causally’ his support must come from theology rather than linguistics.” Turner also agrees.

It also hardly seems fair to link paganism with Judaism. Christianity came out of the roots of Judaism not paganism. The Messiah was the Son of David. And the old argument that baptism is a work where repentance is not is just as faulty as Mantey’s exegesis. Both repentance and baptism are commanded (imperatives) in Acts 2:38. What linguistic device makes baptism a work while repentance is not? We are told to do *both*.

To step out of the book of Acts for a moment, baptism is a part of what Jesus commanded we do in delivering the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20). Repentance has always been linked to baptism from John the Baptist’s baptism. One is invalid without the other. Baptism is not a pious add-on, but an essential part (while not the only part) to completing one’s obedience and turning to God (Acts 3:19).

“By repentance and baptism we show that we have met the conditions for receiving forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit” (Larkin 1995:59). Also Marshall adds, “Calvin insisted that ‘repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it’ (*Institutes* III.iii.1), but it would be truer to say that repentance and faith are the two sides of the same coin. So it is that here repentance is linked with being baptized” (1989:81).

4. TYPES OF BAPTISM

i. Mode of Baptism

Those who practice sprinkling as a method of baptizing realize that is not what the early church practiced nor is it what baptizw really means. Look first at what it says in the Jerusalem Bible (authorized Roman Catholic translation) in a footnote (JB 1969:277) for Romans 6:

Baptism is not separated from faith but goes with it..., and gives it outward expression by the operative symbolism of the baptismal ceremonial. For this reason Paul ascribes to faith and to baptism the same effects (cf. Galatians 2:16-20 and Romans 6:3-9). The sinner is immersed (my underline) in water (the etymological meaning of baptize is dip) and thus buried with Christ.

Even within the Roman Catholic Church's own most recent catechism it says: "Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principle effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit" (R.C. Catechism 1994: VII:321).

The text is clear; the etymology of baptizw is clear. What is uncertain is why there is so much difference in understanding and practice.

ii. Candidates for Baptism

There is no question as to the fact that infant baptism has been the practice of some parts of the church for years. The more relevant questions might be when did it start and by whose authority? "The rise of the critical study of the Bible caused a widespread change of opinion, so that by 1940 the majority of NT scholars (as distinct from systematic theologians) were agreed that in the apostolic age baptism was administered to believers only. In recent years this view has been contested, above all by J. Jeremias, O. Cullman..." (Brown 1986 1:148). Notably K. Aland would be against an early understanding of the practice of infant baptism.

"Dean Henry Alford went so far as to say that Acts 2:39 contributes a 'providential recognition of infant baptism at the very founding of the Christian Church'" (Jewett 1978:119-120). This certainly cannot be right.

There is no real evidence of infant baptism in the 1st century Church.

Aside from the unclear early tradition of the Church, there has been another argument for infant baptism as normative within the Apostolic Church. This argument is focused around the word *oikos* (house or household). Proponents of infant baptism suggest from the texts (Acts 10; 16) that the word *oikos* must certainly include infants. Yet one must readily admit that not all households would have children, let alone infants. And where all infants are children, not all children are infants. The Greek actually has a separate word for infant (*brefos*) which is not found in the Paedobaptists' proof texts.

Even though, admittedly, sprinkling as an unusual form of baptism seems to be in existence early second century, there is no mention of sprinkling infants. While the method of sprinkling may have existed early, it was not formally approved until the 14th century. Jewett also comments: Is it not, then highly implausible that the *Didache* was produced by a community of early Paedobaptists who just happened to say nothing about infant baptism" (1978:40-41)? One understands he is saying this *tongue in cheek*. One also must understand that there is not one explicit example of an infant being baptized in the New Testament record. All we have is groundless speculation in an attempt to prop up non-biblical practices. We dare not manufacture infants in a household or even as children of supposed slaves (Aland 1961:90).

Much like Luther's commentary on Romans is much larger because of comments against the Roman Catholic church, Jeremias' book, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, is larger because of his critique on Aland's comments regarding Jeremias' faulty position.

The argument that Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) quoted in Acts 2 means that we should somehow baptize infants makes no sense. Firstly baptism is not even mentioned. Secondly the term children is not equal with infants. Just because a promise is made to a child (even in prophecy) does not mean they receive the gift at the same time. Some are not old enough to appreciate a gift and may only want to play with the wrapping paper.

Jeremias' conclusion that "the complete families were baptized is confirmed by the analogy of the procedure in proselyte baptism" (1963:27) is faulty, especially if proselyte baptism comes after Christian baptism in time.

The baptism of infants, where it may have been a practice in some areas of the early Church, does not validate it as a practice approved by the Head of the Church, Jesus. Faith of the congregation may be important as a witness, but it is faith that brings a person to baptism not the reverse as Cullman suggests (1961:53-54). Baptism is not the beginning of faith, but the result of faith. What follows baptism is growth in Christ from what has already existed even if in seminal form. To what congregation of faith do the so-called infants in the household

accounts turn. We would normally expect parents to bring their children up in the Lord so that when they were old enough they too could become Christians.

Everyone (with the exception of young children and infants) needs to be baptized in water. Only those who display or exhibit belief (faith), in that they have repented and confessed the Lordship of Jesus though, are proper subjects for Christian Baptism. In the New Testament, only believers were baptized. Baptism by itself will not save you. God is the only one who saves, but baptism is a biblical requirement and is necessary for salvation. Faith is always engendered through hearing the gospel. Faith is always connected with Christian Baptism. It is a conscious act that has been thoroughly thought out.

No person is a subject for Christian Baptism who does not believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God (Hebrews 11:6, John 20:30, 31). Three requirements must be met before Christian Baptism can be scripturally performed. The candidate must believe, he must repent of his sins (Acts 2:38), and he must confess his faith in Christ (Romans 10:9; Matthew 10:32-33). Calvin Phillips, President of Emmanuel School of Religion, says that, "Baptism is the door of entrance into Christ and into the Church. It is not the giver of life, any more than birth gives life".

Infant baptism becomes a distortion of what God intended for His Church. Anyone who has only been baptized as an infant has *not* been baptized as Christ has intended. R. C. Foster makes this comment: "Baptism as a mere physical act (without a spiritual change in the heart of the candidate) is not to be found in the New Testament. What can baptism avail when it is forced on a person who does not understand or desire it?" Look at I Peter 3:21! "and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God..." An infant is unable to make this kind of a promise to God, or any promise for that matter. There is never a recorded incident in the New Testament that any infant was ever baptized.

iii. Water and Spirit

"There is no dichotomy or antagonism between water and spirit baptism in the early church. They were seen as complementary" (Averbeck 2 1981:293). Spirit baptism and water baptism are obviously sometimes separate events such as with Cornelius. But it certainly is difficult to argue that it is Spirit baptism that puts one into the church especially after Acts 10 where Peter insists that the family and friends also be water baptized. Reese (1976:405) puts it well when he says:

Only if we understand I Corinthians (12:13a) to mean 'by the agency of the Spirit men are led (convicted of their sin) to the place where they seek baptism (in water) in order to enter the body of Christ' can we make it harmonize with Acts 10. And if such is the proper interpretation, there are no verses left that can be used to prove that there

is a “Spirit baptism” that puts a man into the body of Christ!

Water and Spirit are wed together normally. Both are required for entrance into God’s kingdom (John 3:5). F.F. Bruce, speaking of Cornelius and the others, says: “Their reception of the Spirit was not regarded as a substitute for baptism in water; rather, their baptism in water was the fitting response to the act of God in bestowing his Spirit” (1988:218).

One should not get the impression that Acts 1:5 and 11:16 are saying that water baptism has been superseded by Spirit baptism. It is only that *now* the Spirit is added to water baptism as a gift. Spirit baptism does not seem to be needed as it once was. “Jesus’ promise of the spirit finds its fulfillment in the unrepeatable period of the church’s beginnings” (Brown 1977 59:135).

Christian Baptism then becomes the point of entry into the Kingdom. It becomes the “when” as well as the “what”. It is clear that unless a person is born of water (baptism) and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom, i.e., he cannot be saved. This is also the time when God comes to dwell within us. M. J. Harris makes the following technical comment on the Greek text (John 3:5): εκυδατος και πνευματος, from or out of water and Spirit, shows that for the writer (John) ‘water’ and ‘Spirit’ together form a single means of that regeneration which is a prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom of God. No contrast is intended between an external element of “water” and the inward renewal achieved by the Spirit. Conceptually the two are one.

5. PURPOSE OF BAPTISM

i. Relationship to Salvation

In Acts 8:12-13, Kistemaker draws the conclusion that “the account of Simon’s baptism is adequate proof that baptism is not an act which effects salvation” (1990:298). This certainly is a true statement if Simon did not have faith or truly repent, but we should not overlook the possibility that he simply walked away from the faith. Kistemaker claims Philip did not know Simon’s heart. It is amazing to me that after nearly 2000 years that a commentator thinks he has better insight into someone who he has never met or talked with. “New Testament language does not always distinguish between believing and professing to believe (s. James 2:19)” (Stott 1990:149).

Baptism in isolation to faith is of no value. In fact, it may be damning if it gives a false sense of security. I like what it says in Romans 6:5 where in the old KJV of the Bible it talks about being “planted” with Christ. That is a clear reference to baptism and the intent is that anything planted will grow and mature.

G. R. Beasley-Murray in his classic work on *Baptism, in the New Testament*, (1962:231) says properly: The language of John 3:5 makes the action of the Spirit at least simultaneous with the act of baptism. Thus the least that should be said is that baptism is the occasion for the new birth. If anyone is dissatisfied with this terminology, it should only be because it is too weak, not too strong. The language of John 3:5 actually warrants a much stronger way of speaking of the relationship between baptism and salvation.

ii. Relationship to Church

If a person is in Christ, he or she is in the Church. To even enter the Kingdom of God one must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Also Galatians 3:26-27 makes a clear connection between baptism and one’s relationship with Christ, the Head of the Church. When one is baptized it is into or in the name of Jesus Christ. Beasley-Murray puts it this way: “Baptism to Christ is baptism to the Church; it cannot be otherwise, for the Church is *σωμα Χριστου*, the Body of Christ” (1962:279).

Donald Guthrie concludes, “There is no support for the view that the use of the triune name would be regarded as any more or less effective than the simple name of Jesus” (1981:719).

Baptism is not a sacrament; it is an ordinance. Baptism is not a way of special officials of the church

dispensing God's grace to his people. Baptism is an act by which both God and the believer then legitimize that faith relationship not a lot different from the marriage ceremony. Up until a person is pronounced husband and wife, they are not. What is the difference? Is it a degree difference in love or commitment? No, it is the willingness to do what is required both by law and God, and then they are married. So it is with baptism!

It appears from Scripture that any believer can baptize another. There is no need for apostolic line or succession. The Apostle Paul is baptized (Acts 9:18) we assume by Ananias (Kistemaker 1990:344). Also in Acts 10:48 it appears that it was others who did the baptizing of Cornelius and his relatives and close friends. Others as well have baptized including probably Apollos (I Corinthians 1:12ff.).

6. CONCLUSION

Speaking about baptism Hull comments, "...many Baptists have been so preoccupied with the mood in which the candidate comes and the mode to which he submits that they have not grasped the meaning which the total event should have as taught in the New Testament" (Hull 1968 65:3).

I believe that many in the Restoration Movement have given baptism such a place of importance in how a person receives salvation that we have forgotten repentance and confession on occasion. In extreme cases faith has not even been present. If we practice baptism without faith, repentance or confession, it is no different than baptizing babies who can make no personal conscious decision for themselves.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer helps us understand this when he says, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate" (1963:47)

Help us not to dispense rites and ritual at the cost of ignorance of who Jesus is. Jesus is our Savior. It is He we must know. Let us not baptize people who do not know the Savior, but help us introduce Him to all those who come to us with the most important question: "What must I do to be saved?" And let us go and tell the world about the gospel and what Jesus has done.

If a person does understand how he should reply to a holy God in faith, repentance and confession then we too might say, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

The question arises: what about my relatives who are no longer with us who were never baptized (immersed), or what about believing disciples of Christ who are not immersed?

Dr. William S. Boice says this, "Neither the Church nor individuals should argue baptism. The believing, repentant person who wants to follow both the Lord's example and His direct command will always find a way to do it. Remember that man does not judge. We do not baptize by either the authority or the command of the Church. The Church is the result of what happens when a man is reconciled to God."

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