

BAPTISM

Its Meaning, Methods, and Recipients

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Note: All Scripture used is from the New King James Version (NKJV).

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to show the biblical basis of the differing viewpoints regarding Christian baptism. This will be a positive approach making a strong case in support of each position. In writing this book, I have two goals.

First, I want to share this information to help some Christians be more informed on this subject. Second, I want to increase the level of tolerance among some believers who may be critical of the way other Christians practice baptism.

I hope this book will be a help to others and accomplish these two important objectives.

Introduction

Baptism is a subject that has caused much division within Christ's church. It is one of those issues about which, when we look to the Bible for answers we have difficulty discerning the truth. I have written this book to try to put these differences among Christians concerning baptism in their proper perspective. We, in the body of Christ, must have an understanding and tolerant attitude toward each other when it comes to the differences in the way we practice some aspects of our Christian worship. This tolerance is not to accept error but to have honor, respect, and acceptance toward those differences the Bible does not clearly address.

It is my hope that this book will provide a better understanding of our Christian brethren who worship God with baptism differently than others do. Let us not criticize or deny the validity of the baptisms of others without specific scriptural authority.

Fine Christian men and women have disagreed concerning several aspects of baptism which will be discussed in this book. Many of these people have spent much time studying this subject and have sincerely and honestly come to different conclusions. After I have spent some time studying these differences, I have come to appreciate and respect the various positions discussed in this book.

This is the key point. We may come to a different opinion based on our own set of conclusions. However, as is the case with the issues discussed in this book, only God knows for sure which set of conclusions is right. Let us be only as dogmatic about these issues as the Bible is.

Thus, in this book I have attempted to show the biblical basis for the purpose, meaning, methods, and recipients of baptism. I have tried to be fair and even-minded in discussing these differences.

Chapter 1

The Purpose of Baptism

Why Baptize?

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen (Matt.28:18-20)

Why did Christ command us to baptize? To properly answer this question, we must first examine the Trinity and see what part each member of the Godhead played in man's salvation.

The Father's role in the salvation of man was His choosing or electing, before the foundation of the world, those who would be saved. Therefore, the Father's part in man's salvation was election.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:3-6)

The Son's work was to die sacrificially for the sins of believers by shedding His blood for their atonement and forgiveness. He redeemed or paid the penalty for their sins. His part in man's salvation is redemption.

⁷ *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, (Eph. 1:7,8)*

The Holy Spirit's role in this process of man's salvation is to apply what the Father and Son did to the heart of the chosen sinner and cause him to be born again or re-created spiritually.

⁴ *Blessed is the man You choose, And cause to approach You, That he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Of Your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)*

³ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

⁴ *Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:3-5)*

The work of the Spirit in the new birth of the Christian is called regeneration. This being "born of water and the Spirit" is a spiritual washing and comes about by the mercy of God and not according to our works or what we did in life.

⁵ *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5)*

Signs and Symbols

Since the Father sent both His Son and Spirit to the world to accomplish the work of man's salvation, He instituted signs and symbols to commemorate or picture Their work. The Lord's Supper is a symbol that represents the sacrifice of Christ in His redemption of Christians. Water baptism is a symbol that pictures the new birth of the believer "...by the washing (baptism

in the Greek) *of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" (Titus 3:5)

Knowing that the flesh is weak, God ordained these signs and symbols to remind man of His love, grace, and mercy. By participating in these acts of worship, the Christian will never take for granted or forget the great love, grace, mercy, and sacrifice God made for him. These signs and symbols are a visual aid to help the Christian grow spiritually.

Chapter 2

The Meaning of Baptism

The Washing of Regeneration of the Holy Spirit

According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the word baptism from the Greek word baptismos means simply a ceremonial washing or cleansing:

909. baptismos *bap-tis-mos'* from 907; ablution (ceremonial or Christian):--baptism, washing

In the Old Testament, washings or baptisms were for the purifying or cleansing of both people and objects.

Why is water used in baptism? There is a threefold aspect regarding washing or cleansing in the Bible. Water is the natural agent for washing and cleansing, and it was used for that purpose in Scripture.

⁵ *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁶ "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially. ⁷ Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. (Num. 8:5-7)*

Blood was used in Scripture for atonement:

¹⁵ *"Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. ¹⁶ So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel,*

and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; (Lev. 16:15,16)

Blood also cleanses us from our sins:

⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

Finally, the Holy Spirit is the great sanctifier and cleanser:

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, (Eph. 5:25-26)

⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5)

In Scripture, water and the Holy Spirit are associated with each other. We have already seen this spiritual washing in John 3:5, Titus 3:5, and Eph. 5:26.

John the Baptist said of Jesus:

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matt. 3:11)

Jesus said to the woman at the well:

But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14)

Peter said of Cornelius and his family:

"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47)

The physical act of water baptism does not save us. (Titus 3:5) Water baptism is a symbolic act of worship which represents our spiritual baptism or washing at our conversion. John the Baptist said that he baptized with water, but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is the spiritual washing alluded to in John 3:5 concerning the new birth and emphasized in Titus 3:5. Therefore, physical water baptism is a symbol which represents our spiritual washing or cleansing of our sins because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

I would like to address one verse that appears to be problematic with what I have just said in the previous paragraph.

Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' (Acts 22:16)

Here Ananias was telling Paul to call on the name of the Lord. The Word of God is showing us that it is by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved and have our sins forgiven. It is at salvation that we have been spiritually baptized and our sins are washed away, not when we are baptized with water. If we are saved and have our sins washed away when we are baptized with water then we are saved by water baptism. The Scripture is clear that we are not saved by works of righteousness but by the grace and mercy of God. (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)

The Christian's Union in Christ's Sufferings, Death, Burial, and Resurrection

The Bible speaks of the Christian's union into the body of Christ by baptism.

³ *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* ⁴ *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* ⁵ *For if we have been united*

together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. (Rom. 6:3-6)

However, this union does not take place at the moment of our water baptism or as a result of it. This union takes place when Christ baptizes or washes us with the Holy Spirit which occurs at regeneration and conversion. (Titus 3:5) Our old man or body of sin is crucified with Christ, has died in Christ's death, is buried in Christ's burial, and the Christian can then walk in newness and freedom of the resurrected life.

Summary

Therefore, to properly understand the meaning of water baptism, one must look to the spiritual baptism for which it is a symbol. The first key aspect is that this spiritual washing (baptism) or cleansing is a work of the regenerating power or new birth of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, this spiritual baptism results in our union in Christ. Our body of sin is crucified, destroyed, buried, and we are then free to walk in newness of life in the likeness of Christ's resurrection. We will still be sinners and have to constantly battle our sin nature, but we, as believers in Jesus Christ, have the help of the Holy Spirit to fight against this sin nature.

¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)

Chapter 3

A Sacrament or Ordinance?

We see from the Great Commission passage (Matt. 28:18-20) that Jesus Christ commanded Christians to baptize others. He also told us that this Christian baptism should be done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

One of the first things we notice about baptism is the way some Christians refer to it. Some call baptism a sacrament and some call it an ordinance. What is the difference between these two terms? Which description is correct?

Sacrament

What does the word sacrament mean? Let's go to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary for a definition of the word sacrament:

"a Christian rite (as baptism or the Eucharist) that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a means of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality"

Those who call baptism a sacrament believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper imparts a spiritual blessing to the one participating in this act of worship. They would say that these signs are a means of grace which provides spiritual encouragement, strength, and sanctification.

Ordinance

Other Christians refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as an ordinance. Let us return to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary for the meaning of the word ordinance:

"an authoritative decree or direction : ORDER"

Those who call these two acts of worship an ordinance are saying they were ordained or commanded by the Lord. They would say that there is no means of grace conveyed to the participant or worshipper. These acts of worship are just symbols that represent spiritual truths.

Which is Correct?

That is a good question. Both of these definitions include the fact that these signs, symbols, or acts of worship have been ordained or commanded by God for Christians to do. Isn't it true that by participating in these acts of worship, we are spiritually strengthened in our faith? Don't they also represent spiritual truths?

How we label or call these acts of worship is not important. What is important is that we are obedient to the Lord, follow His directions, and participate in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 4

The Biblical Case for Sprinkling (The Cleansing of the Priesthood)

The Aaronic Priesthood

In the Old Testament, the Aaronic priesthood came from the tribe of Levi. Before the priest was allowed to perform his duties, it was required that the Levite be cleansed of sin and consecrated to the holy responsibilities he was shortly to assume. This cleansing and consecration of the priest was accomplished by the sprinkling of water and blood.

⁵ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁶ "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially. ⁷ Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. (Num. 8:5-7)

¹⁹ "You shall also take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram. ²⁰ Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. ²¹ And you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons' garments with him. (Ex. 29:19-21)

The Aaronic high priesthood was a picture or type of Jesus Christ's priesthood. (Heb. chapters 8,9) The Old Testament high

priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year and sprinkled the blood of atonement on the mercy seat for the cleansing of the sins of Israel. (Lev. chapter 16)

Christ's Priesthood

Jesus Christ descended from the tribe of Judah and is our great High Priest.

¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Heb. 4:14)

He once entered the heavenly most Holy Place and obtained our eternal redemption by the sprinkling of His blood of atonement.

¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:12-14)

Even though the Aaronic priesthood was a type of Christ's, there was a notable difference. Aaron was a sinner and not eternal. Christ was without sin and the eternal Son of God. Therefore Christ's priesthood was after the order of Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God, who was without the beginning or end of days. (Heb. 7:1-3)

However, the picture God took great lengths to portray of the Aaronic priesthood, with its ritual and tabernacle, was a pre-figure or type of the priesthood of Christ, our High Priest and the heavenly tabernacle.³ *For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One*

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