

Christian Baptism

Our subject is Christian Baptism, as it is made known to us in the Divinely inspired and therefore authoritative New Testament scriptures.

From the many scripture passages which refer to this subject, we shall select three; one from the Gospels, one from the Acts of the Apostles, and one from the Epistles. We shall give our reasons for this selection later.

We shall refer first to the words of our Lord Jesus, as found in Matthew 28:19-20 which reads: "Go ye therefore, and teach (or make disciples of) 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 (age)."

Our second scripture is in Acts 8:39 which reads: "And as they went on their way, 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.' And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

Our third scripture is in Romans 6:3A, which reads: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Our Lord left but two ordinances to be observed by His disciples: baptism and the Lord's supper. Baptism, to be observed but once, subsequent to profession of faith in Christ; and the Lord's supper, which is to be observed each Lord's day until the Lord Jesus comes back again. (1 Cor. 11:23-34)

Christendom, through the years, and without any authority from the word of God, has added five more ordinances, namely: confirmation, penance, extreme unction, matrimony and holy orders. By the word "Christendom," we mean the sum total of all those religious Systems which name the name of Christ, whether they be good, bad or indifferent. There is thus a vast difference between Christianity and Christendom. Christianity is confined, for its sole authority for faith and practice, to the *general teaching* of the New Testament scriptures. It seeks, and rightly demands, a "thus saith the Lord" for all it seeks to teach and practice. Christendom, on the contrary, has added many of the commandments and traditions of men as being of equal authority to the word of God. In many cases, these traditions have been allowed to obscure and even nullify the clear and definite teaching of Scripture, and this has resulted in a tremendous amount of confusion of thought regarding both the subject of baptism, and the Lord's supper.

In the case of baptism, instead of the scriptural truth that baptism is the confession, in symbol, of a regenerated believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection; it is now taught that the rite of baptism actually *produces* this regeneration in the one who is baptized! Thus a baby, after it has been christened, is declared, by the officiating minister, to have become: "A member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom!" Could anything be further from what the word of God so plainly teaches?

In the early days of Christianity, both baptism and the Lord's supper were called

"sacraments," from the Latin word, "sacramentum." This word was used to describe the oath that a person took when he enlisted in the Roman army. At this ceremony the recruit publicly and solemnly vowed that he renounced his civilian status, with all its privileges and liberty of action, and, from henceforth, confessed he now belonged to Caesar, whose every command he promised to obey, cost what it might and lead where it would. Gradually, this word came to be used to describe the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper for, by his obedience to them, a Christian confessed to the world that he now belonged, spirit, soul and body, to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he boldly owned as his personal Savior and the supreme Lord of his life.

This explains why, in many pagan countries, and particularly in Moslem lands, the persecution of a professing Christian does not really begin until he has been baptized. This act becomes, as it were, his "sacramentum" which marks him out, openly and publicly, as one who now belongs to the Son of God. Needless to say, the baptism of an unbeliever is not contemplated in the New Testament: it is for *believers only*.

It is also necessary, when dealing with this subject, to carefully distinguish between *principles* and *personalities*: between the wrong *teaching* of an ecclesiastical system, and the *persons* who are associated with that system. In other words, one may dislike the particular "*ism*" to which a person belongs, but it does not follow that he dislikes the *person* who belongs to that "*ism*." Loyalty to what one believes to be the true teaching of Scripture may necessitate his withdrawal from the *denomination* that teaches the wrong doctrine; but this does not mean that he rejects the *persons* who still remain in that sect, for many are unaware that they have been taught erroneous doctrine. Thus it is the *principle* of the error taught that is condemned, and not the *persons* who have been taught it. This is what is meant by distinguishing principles from personalities.

We are now ready to commence our consideration of the subject of Christian baptism. It will help to clarify the theme if we examine it under several divisions, which will be indicated by Roman numerals.

I. THE DIFFERENT BAPTISMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

There are several baptisms mentioned in the New Testament, and each has its own particular spiritual significance. It is essential, therefore, to distinguish between these various baptisms. Failure to do so will only result in confusion of thought.

1. *The baptism of John*, our Lord's forerunner who was sent to "prepare the way of the Lord." He did this by preaching repentance, and baptizing all who responded to his preaching. Matthew 3 describes the scene as many Jews gathered at the river Jordan, and "were baptized of him, confessing their sins." John's message to these repentant Jews was: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." All who submitted to this baptism acknowledged, by this act, that they repented of their sinfulness and owned that they were worthy of death, of which this baptism was, to them, a picture.

Our Lord actually submitted to this baptism, not because He had any sins to repent of, for He was absolutely sinless, but - "to fulfill all righteousness." Over John's strenuous objections, the

Lord entered the river and allowed John to submerge him beneath the waters. In this way our Lord, prefigured the purpose for which He had come into the world, namely, to go beneath the waves and billows of the judgment of a holy God on account of our sins.

2. *Christ's own baptism unto death.* Mark His words as recorded in Luke 12:49-50: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened (or confined) until it be accomplished!" Thus Christ referred, in this symbolic way, to the awful sufferings through which He would have to pass when He assumed the full liability of all our sins and, by His death, on our behalf, satisfy all the claims of a holy God and the demands of a righteous law, thus making it possible for a lost and guilty sinner, through faith in Him, to be "justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Only our Lord could experience this awful baptism, and well may we praise and adore Him for His substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf!

3. *The baptism with the Holy Spirit into the mystical body of Christ.* This is described in 1 Cor. 12:13: "For by one Spirit are (were) we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." This is the baptism that was prophecied by John the Baptist, as recorded in Mat. 3:1. This baptism with the Spirit took place on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, came and baptized the assembled disciples and formed them into one organism, the mystical body of Christ, the Church.

By the term, "The mystical body of Christ," is not meant the *literal* and *physical* body of our Lord, in which He became incarnate, lived, taught, wrought, suffered, died and rose again; but the *figurative* body of Christ. The New Testament makes use of many metaphors to describe the Church, such as "the flock of God," "the house of God," "the Bride of Christ," "the temple of God" and "the body of Christ." All these terms refer to that called out company of believers in the Lord Jesus, from the formation of it at Pentecost, until its completion at the second coming of Christ. Christ is described as the sole Head of this body, and every believer is a member of it. Each believer is viewed as having shared in the initial baptism which took place at Pentecost.

The baptism of the Spirit is therefore true of *every* Christian. It is *never* referred to as the *individual* experience of a person, but is always spoken of the *collective* act of the Spirit, by means of which the whole Church was formed at the beginning.

4 *The baptism of believers, in water, upon their profession of faith in Christ.* In submitting to this ordinance, a believer confesses, in his symbolic manner, his faith in and his identification with the Son of God in His death, burial and resurrection. Inasmuch as this particular baptism is to be our subject, we shall not enlarge on it at this time.

5. *The baptism of fire, which will be the Christ-rejectors' doom.* Again we refer to the words of John the Baptist, as stated in Mat. 3:1-12: " He (Christ) shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into His garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." It should be obvious that this is a baptism of *judgment* on the ungodly, or the "chaff." It therefore cannot apply to the Christian, who has been guaranteed, by none other than the Lord Jesus, that he "shall not come into condemnation, but is passed out of death into life." (John 5:24) This baptism of fire is further described in Rev. 20, where we read of the judgment of the great white throne.

We have spent some time distinguishing between these five baptisms, for it is important that we keep them distinct in our minds. Failure to do so will result in much confusion of thought in the matter.

II. THE DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, or what is meant by the ordinance?

In brief, it is the Divinely purposed figure, picture, symbol or illustration of each believers' identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. It is important to notice it is *only* an *illustration* of this. The waters of baptism possess no saving virtue or magical quality that imparts eternal life, or regenerates the one who is baptized. This regeneration took place in the history of the believer when he received Christ as his own personal Savior, for we read: 'This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life.' (1 John 5.11-12) Baptism does not bring about the believer's forgiveness, or secure his acceptance with God, for he already has this through faith in the Son of God. See Eph. 1:4-7.

Just as the bread and the cup, at the Lord's supper, only *pictorially* represents the body and blood of Christ, so the Christian, by his obedience in baptism, only *symbolically* demonstrates, to those who witness it, that he has already identified himself with the One who died for him and was buried and rose again. Let us get this fact clearly in our minds, for it will deliver us from the error of believing that baptism is essential to the eternal salvation of the soul.

Romans 6:3-5 puts the matter thus: "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that *like* as Christ was raised again from the dead . . . even so we should also walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the *likeness* of His death, we shall be also in the *likeness* of His resurrection." Note the words: "like" and "likeness," for these are words that speak of similitude, or illustration.

As a believer stands in the water, ready to be baptized, he says as it were: "I hereby confess *my* identification with the Lord Jesus Christ, who bore *my* sins, took *my* place, died in *my* stead and rose for *my* justification. By my baptism, I now publicly acknowledge Christ as my Substitute, Savior and Sovereign and, in this symbolical way, witness to the fact of my identification with Him in His death, burial and resurrection."

The word, "baptism," is the Anglicized form of the Greek word, "baptisma." The verb form is "baptizo." Both are derived from the root word, "bapto," which means "to dip."

The word was used by the Greeks to describe the dyeing of a garment by dipping it into the dye, or the drawing of water by dipping a cup into the container. Thus the idea, conveyed by the word, is *immersion*. We shall deal more fully with this later, when we come to the mode of baptism.

III. OUR AUTHORITY FOR CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

The Christian has but one authority, or source of information on this subject. This, needless to say, is the *general teaching* of the word of God. Note the expression, "the *general*

teaching." By this we mean that each statement of Scripture, regarding any subject studied, must be interpreted in the light of *all the other scripture references* that deal with this particular subject. Most heresies, or false teaching, can find *apparent* support from a text which is isolated from its context, but when this text is examined in the light of all the other scriptures that refer to the subject, its falsity is at once detected. The old adage is true: "Text, without context, is pretext!"

The religious traditions, decrees, and creeds of men, however hoary with antiquity, learnedly composed by able and well educated theologians, and sincerely presented by gifted and eloquent men, should have no voice of authority whatever for the Christian. The sole and final court of appeal is the Divinely inspired and therefore infallible word of God. The Bible puts it thus: "To the law and the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them." (Isa. 8:20)

An ordinance to be scripturally valid must meet a three fold requirement. First, it must be commanded by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. Second, it must be practiced by the early disciples, as recorded in the Acts. Third, it must be expounded in the Epistles. Only baptism and the Lord's supper meets this threefold test. That is why we read the three passages in the beginning. Let us briefly review these three requirements.

First, did our Lord command this ordinance, as recorded in the Gospels? The answer is an emphatic affirmative. One has only to turn to Matthew 28:19-20, and Mark 16:15-16 to read of the Lord's commission to His disciples to verify this fact.

Second, do we have the apostolic example, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles? Again the answer is in the affirmative. Ten times it is recorded that believers in Christ were baptized on their profession of faith in Him. In each case baptism did not *precede*, but always *followed* conversion. There is not a single case of infant baptism recorded in its pages.

Third, is the spiritual significance of baptism expounded in the Epistles? One has only to read these inspired letters to see how clearly the deep and underlying meaning of baptism is plainly revealed. Take Romans 6, for instance. While water baptism is not the subject of this chapter, it is mentioned in order to illustrate the believer's identification with the Lord Jesus. Paul takes it for granted that those to whom he wrote had been baptized in a scriptural manner, for he wrote: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" In Ephesians, Paul uses baptism to illustrate the unity into which each Christian has been brought. In Colossians, baptism is used to show the new sphere of completeness into which the believer has been brought through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Thus the ordinance of baptism meets the threefold test of its validity as a scriptural ordinance.

IV. THE SUBJECTS OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Scripture only contemplates one class of people who are eligible for Christian baptism, and they are those who, through personal faith in the Son of God, have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, and are now called the children of God. This, as can be readily appreciated, eliminates any idea of infant baptism, either by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. The New Testament knows nothing whatever of such a practice. It is purely the invention of

man and has wrought incalculable mischief. In fact, the New Testament neither teaches *adult* baptism, or *child* baptism. The only baptism it teaches is the baptism of *believers*, whether old or young. Once this fact is thoroughly grasped, it will deliver a Christian from being carried away by the subtle arguments of those who seek to teach otherwise.

Out of the many references to baptism in the Acts, we will select three. First, the Corinthians, as found in Acts 18. Here we are told: "Many Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized." Could anything be plainer than this? Second, Cornelius and his household, described in Acts 10. As Peter proclaimed the gospel, the Spirit of God fell on the hearers and Peter declared: "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we" Third, the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, mentioned in Acts 8. After Philip had led him to Christ, the eunuch, seeing a pool of water, inquired: "See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip replied: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." At this, both Philip and the eunuch descended into the water and Philip baptized the new convert.

V. THE MODE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

From a reading of the New Testament scriptures, we could say that baptism is the immersion of a person in water, subsequent to his profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is the confession of his identification, in symbolic form, with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. We shall seek to prove this from the word of God.

First, by the meaning of the word. *This* as we have seen, means to dip, or immerse. The question may well be raised: "Since the translators of the Authorized Version knew that the word 'baptism' meant to immerse, why did they not render the word by its English equivalent, 'immerse'?" The answer has been suggested that: "While, as scholars, they could not translate them *falsely*, as biased theologians, they could not translate them *truly*."

It is both interesting and revealing to read the comments of some very able clergymen, whose denominational affiliation prevents them from practicing the scriptural form of baptism, which is immersion. We will select a few.

(1) Cannon Liddon an Episcopalian, wrote: "The baptism of adults by immersion is present in the apostle's mind: the descent into the water, (katadusis) and the rising from it (anadusis), were two striking features of the rite."

(2) Dr. Sanday and A. C. Headiam, also Anglicans, write: "Baptism expresses symbolically a series of acts . . . immersion-death; submersion - burial; emergence - resurrection."

(3) Dr. Palmer, another Anglican wrote: "The element was always water, and the mode of using it was commonly immersion."

(4) Bishop Moule declared: "Scripture indicates a usage of immersion in Apostolic missions very plainly, and it connects baptism with our Lord's death, burial and resurrection doctrinally."

Second, baptism requires water, in fact, much water for its observance. We are told "John was baptizing in Aenon . . . for there was much water there." In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, we are told that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and, after the

baptism, both came up out of the water. Peter said: "Who can forbid water that these should not be baptized?"

Third, *the method employed is immersion*, as the Greek word "baptisma" must be translated and, as we have seen, is admitted by those who do not practice the correct form of baptism.

Fourth, *By the illustration used to convey its meaning*. It is spoken of as a "burial." Romans 6:4 leaves us in no doubt as to this: "Buried with Him by baptism into death." Burial necessitates a complete putting out of sight. We do not bury corpses by sprinkling a few grains of sand on the body, or by pouring a little earth on the corpse. It should be surely obvious therefore that the sprinkling or pouring of water cannot be spoken of as a burial, or a baptism, in the New Testament sense of the term. Therefore, by the meaning of the Greek word, by the element required, by the mode employed in Scripture, and by the illustration used, that of a burial, we can only conclude that immersion is the logical and scriptural form of baptism.

VI. SOME DIFFERING VIEWS OF BAPTISM.

Perhaps a brief glance at some of the various views of baptism may help us to better appreciate the confusion that obtains in Christendom regarding this subject. It is astounding to record that, in spite of the clear teaching of the New Testament regarding the meaning, subjects and mode of baptism, there should be any controversy in the matter. Yet this subject has divided Christendom into various groups, each intent on advocating its own particular views on the subject and, in some cases, cruelly persecuting those who dared to differ from them. We shall describe six of these different views.

1. Those who teach and practice infant baptism.

This is the belief of millions of people, of both Roman Catholic and Protestant persuasion. It is definitely taught in a printed form of Church procedure, and in words that admit of no other meaning. It is stated that when a baby is brought to a minister of religion and sprinkled with a few drops of water, accompanied by a specified and recited formula, the child is then declared to have become: "A Member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of God." The minister is also instructed to say, after the baby has been christened: "Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is, by baptism, regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks to Almighty God for these benefits."

This teaching regarding infant baptism and baptismal regeneration, for which there is not a shred of support in the New Testament, apparently came into existence towards the close of the second century. A good book on Church history is almost essential to be able to appreciate how infant baptism came to be introduced and, in spite of the opposition which was first given to the theory, soon came to be tolerated and finally accepted and adopted in Christendom. Such a book is Andrew Miller's "Church History," formally published in three volumes, but now issued in one volume of over a thousand pages. It describes the history of the early Church, after the death of the Apostles, its trials and triumphs, and of its gradual departure from the faith through the introduction of man-made theories, traditions, commandments, ritual and a host of additions to the completed revelation of the New Testament scriptures.

Dean Stanley, himself a practicer of infant baptism, wrote: "In the apostolic age, and the

three centuries that followed, it is evident that, as a general rule, those who came to baptism came in full age and of their own deliberate choice." Paul's prophecy, concerning the declension of the church, addressed to the elders of Ephesus, soon came to be fulfilled. let us note his words: "I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears." (Acts 20:29-31) Here is "apostolic succession" with a vengeance!

After the death of the apostles, men arose, of otherwise good character and quite sincere, who began to suggest that perhaps the waters of baptism contained a mystical and magical quality which, in some mysterious way, cleansed a person from his sins. As early as 140 A.D. Hermes wrote: "We descend into the water full of sins and filth, and come forth fruitful, and have in our hearts the fear of God and hope on Jesus in the Spirit."

The tragic union of the Church and State, under Constantine, merely hastened the process of deterioration in the professing Church, and soon infant baptism, by immersion, became the accepted rule. The aim was to have a "Christian nation," and the best method to attain this end was to have all the babies baptized, and soon everybody would be considered a Christian simply because he had passed through this ceremony. By the sixth century infant baptism had become universal. As a result of still more additions, the ceremony attending infant baptism became so intricate that only the learned could fathom the complicated ritual, and soon only the "clergy" were permitted to perform the ceremony.

Many clever arguments are advanced by the proponents of infant sprinkling, and many are the texts by which they seek to bolster their contention; but when these texts are examined in the light of all the scriptures that bear on the matter of baptism, their falsity will become apparent to the person who rightly demands a "thus saith the Lord" as the alone authority for his faith and practice. A thorough reading of the New Testament will serve to convince the reader that there is no scripture that warrants the baptism of an infant, or that baptism contributes in any way to the regeneration of the person baptized.

2. Those who ignore the truth of Christian baptism.

Both the Quakers and the Salvation Army adopt the position that the baptism of believers in water is no longer necessary, seeing it has no saving quality. The reply to this argument is that while we agree that baptism does not save or regenerate, yet an ordinance which was commanded by none other than the Lord Jesus, practiced by the early Church, and its spiritual significance expounded in the Epistles cannot be looked upon as unnecessary. Such a view takes issue with the New Testament, which has been given for the guidance of all believers, and is described as being "profitable for doctrine (or teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect (or mature) throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16-17) No person, or body of persons, have any right to say that what the word of God plainly teaches is unnecessary for Christians to observe.

3. Those who vigorously oppose Christian baptism.

There is a comparatively small, but very active and vocal group, who declare, most emphatically, that the ordinance of baptism is no longer valid in this present dispensation. This theory was introduced some years ago by a learned Anglican clergyman named Bullinger, and his peculiar ideas have come to be known as "Bullingerism," or "Ultra-dispensationalism."

Time does not permit an examination and refutation of their doctrine. However, the interested reader may learn of them in a booklet written by the late H. A. Ironside, entitled: "Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth," published by Loizeaux Bros., of Neptune, New Jersey.

4. Those who teach that baptism is essential to salvation.

Far from belittling baptism, these people have swung to the other extreme and declare that, apart from water baptism, there is no salvation! They actually teach that, however good and godly a Christian may be, if he has not been baptized following his profession of faith in Christ, he is still a lost sinner and therefore under the condemnation of God! The people who teach this monstrous doctrine are quite militant in their attitude, very fond of disputation and quite active in the propagation of their erroneous views. Their favorite scriptures are Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20, and particularly Acts 2:38. As in the case of other heresies, one has only to interpret these, and the other texts they use, in the light of their context, and all the other scriptures that refer to the subject of baptism, to discover the inadequacy of their contention. It surely is reasonable to assume that if salvation is conditioned by baptism, then in every reference to salvation, baptism would be mentioned as obligatory, but such is most emphatically not the case. For a fuller description of their views, and the scriptural argument against them, the writer's book entitled "Christian Baptism" (250 pages) may prove helpful. It can be obtained from the publisher of this booklet.

There are very many thousands of truly born again persons who are living Christ-exalting and God-glorifying lives, but who, due to incomplete teaching, have never learned the truth of believers' baptism. Are these Christians lost and still in their sins because they have not been scripturally baptized? Perish this Christ-dishonoring and most unscriptural thought! While we firmly maintain that all Christians should be baptized on their profession of faith in Christ, we strenuously reject any suggestion that this ordinance is, in any way, essential to one's eternal salvation. If it were, the scriptures would plainly teach it, but the New Testament does nothing of the kind. It is the precious blood of Christ, and not the waters of baptism that cleanses the sinner from the guilt of sin.

5. Those who teach and practice baptism for, or on behalf of those who have died.

This is the belief of the Mormons, who base their authority for this practice on 1 Cor. 15 :29, which reads: "What shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" The Mormons teach, from this text, that a *living* person may be baptized in *the place of a person* who has died without embracing Mormonism as his religious belief. By this baptism by proxy, it is taught that, in the future life, after the resurrection, this person would be enabled to accept Mormonism if he so desired!

The answer to this weird theory is that the New Testament knows nothing whatever about proxy baptism. There is no example of it cited and no direction given for its observance. Just as no person can believe on Christ for another, or be saved for another, or be born again for another, so no one can be baptized for another.

There is a simple explanation for this scripture. Let us think of all Christians as forming an army to do battle against a common enemy. As time goes on, the ranks of this army become depleted by the hand of death, and thus gaps are left in the ranks. The question is: who is to take the place of those who have died? There is only one answer. Those believers who are being saved and baptized on their profession will fill the gaps in the ranks. Thus, by their baptism, which is the symbolic and outward expression of their inward identification with

Christ, they take the place of those who have been removed by death.

6. Those who teach and practice "Household baptism."

This theory affirms that when a father or mother is saved and baptized, each member of this Christian's family, including the infants and the household servants, should also be baptized. Furthermore, all babies, born subsequently into that household, should also be baptized, as infants, by immersion. They teach that by this act the child is introduced into "a circle of privilege," or "into the kingdom of God," or "into the house of God." However, they do not believe that the child is regenerated thereby.

One of the best known leaders in this circle of believers, C. H. Macintosh, author of the world famous "Notes on the Pentateuch," voiced his objections to this theory in no uncertain terms, and wrote: "For my own part, seeing the question has been thus forced upon me, I can only say I have, for thirty two years been asking, in vain, for a single line of Scripture for baptizing any save believers, or those who profess to believe. Reasons I have had, and deductions, but of direct Scripture authority, not a tittle." Another writer has tersely summed up the theory in these words: "Household Baptism is an attempt to form a synthesis between two incompatibles; infant baptism, the device of man, and Christian baptism, the ordinance of Christ!" (W. Hoste)

VI. THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

While the physical act of baptism takes but a few moments to perform, it takes the whole lifetime of the believer to live out all its spiritual implications! Though it is a simple ordinance, its spiritual significance is most profound and of very far reaching importance. However, it is not necessary for a believer to comprehend all the spiritual meaning that is involved in baptism before he can be baptized, although, of course, it is good for him to be concerned regarding this matter.

Doubtless the children of Israel did not understand all the spiritual meaning involved in keeping the various feasts of Jehovah, or the ornate ritual associated with the tabernacle, the priesthood and the many offerings, with their complicated ceremonies; but this did not prevent them from observing the feasts and offering the sacrifices. They simply obeyed the directions that God gave them in His word. The same is true in the matter of baptism.

1. It is a divine command to be obeyed.

It is basically a simple act of obedience to the One who, as his Lord and Master, commanded it to be done. It is the duty of a Christian to obey his Lord unhesitatingly, for obedience is essential to discipleship. The Lord said: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." And again: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." (John 14:15; 13:17) There is no substitute for obedience to the known will of the Lord Jesus.

2. It is the divinely given illustration of each believer's identification with Christ

in His death, burial and resurrection.

Let us think of this threefold identification which is symbolized in baptism.

(1). Identification into the death of Christ. In the reckoning of God, each Christian is viewed as having died in the Person of his Divine Substitute. This is a tremendous truth, that would be incredible but for the fact it is clearly stated in the word of God. Paul, by the Spirit, puts it thus: "I am (have been) crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal 2:20)

Death is the termination of a life, The life which a person lived prior to his conversion was a life characterized by spiritual death, or separation from the life of God. When the believer trusted Christ as his personal Savior, this old life came to an end, or, as the Bible puts it: "Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17) The believer can now declare: "When Christ died, I died to all that for which He died, therefore I reckon myself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, my Lord!" (Rom. 6:11)

(2). Identification with Christ in His burial, for we read: "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death." (Rom. 6:4) Burial is the proof of death, for only the dead are buried. This is why immersion is the only logical picture of baptism. The person to be baptized stands in the water. Unresistingly, he allows himself to be buried beneath the water, thus depicting his burial with Christ who died for his sins.

(3). Identification with Christ in His resurrection, for the believer comes out from the water to illustrate his resurrection with his Lord, henceforth to walk with Him in newness of life. See Rom. 6:5. Thus baptism has a deep spiritual meaning for the Christian. To treat such an ordinance with indifference, and label it a "non essential," is to question the wisdom of the Lord in instituting it. To magnify it, and make it an essential to one's eternal salvation, is equally reprehensible. To alter its mode from immersion to sprinkling, or pouring, is to rob it of its true significance. To substitute the christening of irresponsible babies for the baptism of professing believers is to introduce something for which there is no scriptural warrant.

3. Baptism is a testimony to one's faith in Christ, to be public.

There are no "secret baptisms" described in the New Testament. It was performed in the presence of others, and thus became a public confession of one's faith in the Lord Jesus. In the early days of Christianity this brought, upon the baptized believer, the world's scorn and persecution and even death. Thus our Lord's words were fulfilled: "In the world ye shall have tribulation. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 16:33; 15:20)

VII. WHAT BAPTISM CANNOT DO.

We have viewed baptism principally from a *positive* standpoint. Now let us glance at it in a *negative* way and learn what it cannot do.

1. It cannot regenerate a person. This is the sole work of the Holy Spirit who, when a sinner trusts in the finished work of Christ, and receives Him as his own personal Savior, indwells him, and imparts to him a divine nature which enables him to live to the glory of his Lord and Savior. See Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 6:19-20. Nor does baptism bring about the salvation of the soul, for there are thousands of saved people who have never been baptized in a scriptural manner.

2. It cannot make disciples, it can only *mark* them. We are told that "Jesus *made* and *baptized* more disciples than John." (John 4:1) Thus a distinction is drawn between *making* and *baptizing* disciples. Disciples are made through the preaching, hearing and believing the message of the gospel. They are then *marked* as disciples by being baptized.

3. It does not introduce a believer into the mystical body of Christ, the Church. This, as we have seen, is the exclusive prerogative of the Spirit of God, for we read: "In one Spirit were ye all baptized into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13) Every believer is viewed by God as being joined to this one body, which has Christ as its sole Head, and every believer as a member in it.

4. It is not the door of admission to participation in the Lord's supper. While baptism by immersion, after faith in Christ, is the plain teaching of Scripture, yet this must not be allowed to become the basis of our fellowship with other Christians, who have not yet seen this truth from the word of God. By all means, let us put this truth before them in a kindly and courteous manner. If, however, they do not see this truth, but express themselves as being willing to obey it when they do see it, let us not make this ordinance a must before they can be allowed to partake of the Lord's supper, which they *do see* from the Scriptures.

VIII. THE HINDRANCES TO BAPTISM.

Failure to obey the Lord in the ordinance of baptism may stem from various causes.

1. It may be due to a lack of knowledge of its truth. The introduction of infant baptism has resulted *in* a vast multitude of people, some saved and others unsaved, but all having been subjected to a form of baptism the Bible knows nothing about. In the case of believers, they have been taught that their christening was the equivalent of Biblical baptism, so consequently they are quite satisfied that this is so. It is to such that this message has been given. May God use it to enlighten each believer as to this blessed truth!

2. It may be due to prejudice. This has been wittily defined as "being *down* on what we are not *up* on!" Prejudice is a wrong opinion formed before proper and impartial investigation has been made. It is possible to be quite sincere in a certain belief and, at the same time, be sincerely mistaken! Clergymen, who teach and practice infant baptism, will naturally do their best to create, in the minds of their parishioners, the impression that baptism by immersion, subsequent to conversion, is a mistaken idea. This prejudice, once formed, is not easily combated. Only the Spirit of God can accomplish it, as a person, humbly, honestly and prayerfully, seeks to search the Scriptures.

3. It may be due to pride. For a person, who has long opposed baptism by immersion, to admit he has been wrong is a bitter pill to swallow. For such a person to be publicly baptized by immersion might involve his withdrawal from the ecclesiastical system to which he has previously belonged, and this is admittedly a difficult step to take; but it has its compensation in the peace of mind and conscience it gives, and this is of infinite value.

Whatever the cause may be which keeps a believer from obeying what he knows to be the command of the Lord regarding baptism, it is too big a price to pay. May each Christian give himself no rest until, like Ezekiel, he can truthfully say: "I did so as I was commanded." (Ezek. 12:7) Remember, there is no substitute for personal and prompt obedience to the known will of God, as found in His word. Samuel's word to king Saul sums it up: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Sam. 15:22) It is still true that: "Light

accepted bringeth light, and light rejected bringeth night." The hymnwriter was perfectly correct when he wrote:

"When we walk with the Lord, In the light of His word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey!
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey!"

It would be far better not to have known the scriptural mode of baptism, than to know it and then refuse to submit to it.

IX. THE MESSAGE OF BAPTISM.

1. *To the unsaved.* May the message concerning the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that baptism presents, be used to lead each unsaved reader to an acceptance of Christ as his own personal Savior and to a confession of Him as the Lord of his life!

2. *To the unbaptized believer.* May this message lead you to an honest consideration of this subject, and to a glad obedience to the command of your Lord and Savior to be baptized.

3. *To the baptized believer.* May this consideration of the scriptural importance of baptism be used to lead us to a greater appreciation of the spiritual significance of this ordinance, and to a more devoted life to the glory of the One whose death, burial, resurrection and present ministry for us at God's right hand has made such a great salvation possible!

A.P. Gibbs

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