

Foundational Principles of the Christian Faith

Chapter 3

Water Baptism

Water baptism is one of two ordinances Jesus left for the Church to practice. The other is communion (which is the subject of Lesson 5 in this course of studies). An ordinance is a rule made by authority, a decree. It is not an optional extra that Christians may or may not choose to do. It has been commanded by Jesus and we do it as an act of obedience to the Lord's command (CP Mt 28:18-20 with Jn 14:15, 21,23). We will be referring to water baptism in this study simply as baptism like the Bible does except where we need to differentiate between different kinds of baptism. To baptize means to fully immerse, to dip, as in the dyeing of a garment (CP Mt 3:13-17). For Jesus to come up out of the water He had to first go down under the water (CP Ac 8:26-39). This is baptism God's way: believers are fully immersed in water upon confession of their faith in Jesus.

Jesus had no need to be baptized unto repentance for the remission of sins by John's baptism in Mt 3:13-17. Jesus was sinless but He got baptized to be identified with sinners: "He was numbered with the transgressors" (CP Isa 53:12). Jesus was to fulfil all righteousness by bearing the curse of the law for those who did sin and He took His place with sinners in John's baptism as the pledge that He was ready to go down into death for them. By His baptism unto John's baptism Jesus identified Himself with sinners and by their baptism, repentant sinners identify themselves with Jesus. It is their pledge of a good conscience toward God - a conscience reconciled to God by their new found faith in the resurrected Christ and the salvation benefits He has purchased for them with His blood (CP 1Pe 3:18-21).

Peter teaches here that just as Noah's building of the ark was a testimony to his faith in God before the flood, so believers going through the waters of baptism is a testimony to their faith in Christ for their salvation before they were baptized. The water that saved the ark was

an Old Testament symbol of the salvation that is in the finished work of Christ. The water of Noah's flood was the medium of both salvation and destruction. The same water that destroyed the ungodly was also the salvation of the godly, and it is only in this context that Peter speaks of Noah and his family as having been saved by water. Peter is careful to point out that it is not the symbol itself that saves, but what it symbolises. He explains that baptism is not the washing away of our sins, but the response of our heart toward God and the affirmation of our faith in the resurrected Christ and the salvation we are given as a result of that faith, but it cannot, and does not save us. It does not make us Christians, but it marks us as being Christians, it is not the bridge to heaven, but it is the badge of discipleship (CP Ro 6:3-4).

A great many Christians believe that water baptism is referred to here but that is not so. This baptism is spiritual: the baptism of believers into Christ by the Holy Spirit at their conversion to Christ. This is when they are born again spiritually and have the power of sin over their lives broken. That is the "newness of life" Paul refers to in V4. It speaks of the new life imparted by the Holy Spirit at their new birth which is a motivating energy, providing both the desire and the power for believers to live a godly life in Christ. It does not dictate what kind of a life believers are to live before the world as their Christian testimony, but how to live that life in the power of the resurrected Christ, and that is the theme of Paul's teaching right throughout Romans 6 and many other scriptures (CP Gal 2:20; 3:26-27; Col 2:8-13). We need to know these scriptures in order to keep them in their proper perspective (CP Ro 6:1-23). Being baptized into Christ is the basis for the believer's power to live a godly life in Christ and be saved (CP 1Cor 12:12-14). Here the Church is called "Christ" and is compared to a human body with its many members. This shows how the Church is constituted. It teaches us how the Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus as members of His Church when we are converted to Christ. It was when we surrendered our life to Christ that we identified with His death, burial and resurrection. It is not when we are baptized in water (CP Eph 4:1-5). This is another scripture many Christians believe refers to water baptism also but it too refers to the baptism of believers into Christ. Paul illustrates for us here the sevenfold spiritual unity of God and man: one body (the Church); one Holy Spirit; one hope of our calling; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; and one God. In V1-3 Paul exhorts the Church to be unified in the spirit because, as he points out in V4-6, there is only one body in Christ, which is the Church, and we were all

baptized into that one body. This clearly has nothing to do with water baptism but to the only baptism that saves - the believer's baptism into Christ and His Church (CP Col 2:8-13). Once again, the baptism referred to is into Christ, not water.

There is no warrant in Scripture to teach that baptism saves but there are many who teach that it does. They teach what is called baptismal regeneration which lulls those who believe in it into a sense of false security concerning their salvation. The only baptism that saves as we have learned from our study here is being baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ. We need to know the Scriptures which the false teachers use so that we can contend for the truth (CP Mk 16:15-16). We learn here that it is possible to be condemned for not having believed, but it is not possible to be saved by having been baptized without believing.

Believing, not baptism, is the key to salvation (CP Jn 3:18; Eph 2:8-9).

This does not detract though from the need to be baptized as an act of obedience to the Lord's command notwithstanding that it will not save us (CP Jn 3:5). Jesus is not alluding to baptism here as the agent for salvation when He declared that one must be born of water to be saved. Jesus uses the word water here figuratively in the context of salvation by the Word of God. The Word of God is the water of life. That is what saves us, not the water of baptism (CP Psa 119:9).

We are saved by the Word, and we cleanse our way by continuing obedient to the Word. "Heed" implies hearing and obeying. If baptism was a pre-requisite for salvation the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43 could never have been saved. The essential pre-requisite for salvation is a genuine spiritual hunger and thirst for the things of God (CP 1Cor 1:17-18, 21). Paul is not minimising the importance of being baptized here but rather is stressing the fact that God ordained him to preach the Word for salvation, as it is the Word, which is Jesus Himself ("...and the Word was made flesh..." John 1:14) that saves, not baptism (CP Eph 5:25-26). Here we get a much clearer understanding of what being born of water means. This teaches us that Christ is setting the Church apart and cleansing it - making it holy unto Himself - by His Word. The washing of water by the Word is a symbol of the cleansing of the soul by the Word of God even as water is used for the cleansing of our bodies (CP 1Pe 1:23-25). This is virtually the same teaching as Eph 5:25-26. Men are saved by the Word alone (CP Rev 21:5-6). Christ Himself is speaking here. He promises that whoever thirsts for knowledge of Him will be given to drink of the water of life. All who hunger and thirst for Christ will be saved (CP Isa 55:1-7; Jn 4:5-14) when they believe. The

water given by Christ means spiritual life, but to partake of the spiritual life in Christ we need to be continually drinking of the living water. No one can continue to drink of the water of life if he or she becomes severed or separated from its source. That means no one is eligible for salvation if they are not abiding in Christ and His Word is abiding in them (CP Ac 22:16). This is another Scripture used to teach that baptism saves, but when we remember that Paul was already saved and filled with the Holy Spirit before he was baptized as Ac 9:17-18 clearly teaches, it is not hard to see through the false teaching relating to Ac 22:16 (CP Ac 9:17-18). Paul is not teaching baptismal regeneration. Let the Scriptures speak for themselves, (CP 1Cor 1:17-18,21; 4:15; 15:1-2; Jas 1:18,21; 1Pe 1:23-25 with Ro 1:16).

There is also no warrant whatever in scripture for infant baptism. It is totally unscriptural (CP Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Ac 2:41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:17-18; 16:14-15, 30-34; 18:8; 1Pe 3:21). Again the Scriptures speak for themselves, and they all teach that faith in the Lord Jesus is the prerequisite for salvation. Only those able to indicate such faith are eligible to be baptized, and then they must be fully immersed in water, not just sprinkled with it. How can an infant affirm faith in Jesus out of a good conscience toward God as Peter teaches in 1Pe 3:21 or vocalise its belief in Christ as the Ethiopian Eunuch did in Ac 8:36-38? In Mt 28:19 and Mk 16:16 Jesus commanded us to baptize disciples. Disciples are repentant sinners who make conscious decisions to follow Jesus. Infants cannot make conscious decisions on any issues. Any argument for infant baptism is answered by the plain indisputable fact that Jesus did not command it and it is totally unscriptural. In fact there is not even one teaching for the Church in Scripture about dedicating little children to the Lord by any kind of Christian ceremony. Only those with a scriptural right to baptism should be baptized. This is the form of baptism God has designated and whoever changes that form changes the meaning of baptism and the doctrine of salvation, which becomes more evident as this study progresses (CP 1Cor 15:20-29).

There are many divided opinions on what V29 here means. Suffice it to say Paul is not validating what the Corinthians are doing. He is simply showing up the inconsistency of the false teachers at Corinth; they reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead yet embrace the fallacy of being baptized for the dead. It is a contradiction in terms and Paul illustrates their fallacious teaching by it. Paul is NOT speaking of baptizing living believers in place of either believers or unbelievers who are now dead. There is NO assignment of saving efficacy to baptism.

The argument is: Of what value is it for one to trust Christ and be baptized in the ranks left vacant by the believing dead, if there is no resurrection for believers? Why place life in jeopardy and forfeit the benefits of this life, if there is no life after death?

To summarise this study thus far we have learned the importance, the purpose, the meaning, and the form of baptism. But there is still one more teaching and that is the order in which baptism is to be performed (CP Mt 28:19-20). Jesus gave three distinct and separate commands here and He stipulated baptism second to salvation in order of importance. That means that as soon as repentant sinners are converted to Christ they are to be baptized, and then, after they have been baptized, we are to teach them. These commands are directed to the whole Church, not only to those in public ministry. Every Christian in the New Testament Church has been authorised by the Lord Jesus Christ in Mt 28:19-20 and Mk 16:15-16 to get saved, to baptize and to teach repentant sinners the way of God, and it is incumbent upon every Christian to do so. Sadly though, most contemporary Christians do not do this and it is generally left up to the Church leaders to baptize new converts, which invariably means that baptisms then have to fit in with Church timetables. This should not be so, sinners do not have to be taken to Church to be saved and neither do repentant sinners have to be taken to Church to be baptized. This is not denigrating Church-held baptismal services, but directing the Church's attention to the biblical pattern for baptizing new converts, which is the example we should all follow. The importance of baptism in God's redemptive plan was not lost on the first century Church as it is on the Church today. Back then the Church stressed baptism as an integral part of their gospel message and immediately repentant sinners confessed their faith in Christ they were baptized. The Church today does not do this and we are remiss in our sacred duty to God's Word for not doing so (CP Ac 2:36-42).

When Peter was asked here "...what shall we do?", he told them to repent and be baptized. He did not mean that salvation depended on being baptized - he was simply restating what Jesus commanded the Church to do. Notice the order of events that followed: first they got saved (CP V37-38), second they were baptized (CP V41), third they were taught (CP V42) - exactly as Jesus commanded in Mt 28:19-20 (CP Ac 8:12, 36-38). We learn from V36 here that Philip emphasised the importance of baptism as part of his gospel message to the Eunuch, because as soon as he saw the water the Eunuch asked to be baptized. Philip did not have to ask him if he wanted to be - the Eunuch already

knew it to be an integral part of God's redemptive plan and as soon as he confessed his faith in Jesus, Philip baptized him and this is the pattern throughout all the other scripture references to baptism in the book of Acts. As soon as repentant sinners acknowledged Jesus as their saviour, they were baptised (CP Ac 9:17-18; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 30-34; 18:8; 19:1-7). Obeying Jesus' command to be baptized is the repentant sinner's first act of obedience to God's word, and it should not be delayed wherever water is available and the new convert is able to be baptized. Baptism does not have to be a public ceremony to be valid in God's eyes. The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:36-38 was baptized privately and his baptism was no less valid than that of the three thousand who got baptized on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:41. Some Churches have even discarded baptism altogether. They are in grave error. Whoever discards baptism might as well discard the Bible and disregard every other one of Christ's commands as well. Jesus has commanded the Church to baptize repentant sinners in the same breath virtually as He told us to get them saved, and He has not repealed either of those commands. To say that baptism is not valid for today is to say that neither is salvation, and that Scriptures are meaningless (CP Mt 28:18-20). Jesus qualifies the life-span of His commands to the Church by adding, "...and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." That means Christ was not only speaking to the apostles for their era, but to Christians throughout the whole of the Church age. Jesus has commanded all Christians of all eras to help build His Church. We are to get sinners saved, baptize them, and teach them to obey all that Christ has commanded us, which includes the command to baptize them (CP Ac 2:36-39). The promise is to all repentant sinners throughout the whole of the Church age from the day of Pentecost onwards. Those that were afar off then are us today and they that come after us. This also qualifies the life span of Christ's commands. The same commands apply today as applied then and will continue to apply until Jesus comes back for His saints, which brings about the end of the Church age on earth (CP Jn 14:1-3 with 1Th 4:13-18). Mt 28:18-20 highlights the responsibility of the Church to safeguard the true teachings of Scripture and commit them to others seeking the truth without compromise or corruption.

In conclusion there is one more issue concerning baptism which needs to be addressed and that is the name in which new converts are to be baptized. There are some who teach that the only valid baptism is being baptized in the name of Jesus and they use Scriptures to support this

teaching (CP Ac 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). There are many differences of opinion concerning these Scriptures and being right or wrong is not fundamental to salvation because Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and so it would conform to Scripture to be baptized in His name only (CP Col 2:8-12). However Jesus commands us to baptize new converts in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and like baptism itself He has never repealed this order either, so that should be sufficient enough reason for us to obey Him. If there is any lingering doubt though as to the correct way, then simply baptize new converts in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, by the authority of Jesus. This will conform to all the biblical requirements. Finally, if you have not yet been baptized, let us ponder the words of Jesus in Jn 13:17, "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." Amen!