

**IF  
THOU  
BELIEVEST...**

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# IF THOU BELIEVEST...

The Place of Baptism in  
the Counsel of God

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## PREFACE

This booklet is a verse by verse study of Christian baptism as it is presented to us in the New Testament. It is written for those who have put their faith in the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and who have received the assurance of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Him.

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being dead unto sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes *ye were healed.*”  
1 Peter 2.24.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation but is *passed from death unto life.*” John 5.24.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee: Except a man be *born again,* he cannot see the kingdom of God.”  
John 3.3.

If you know in your own personal experience what is meant in these three verses by the words “to be healed,” “to pass from death unto life,” and “to be born again,” then this booklet can be a blessing to you. But if these matters are things hidden and mysterious to you, then we have to warn you according to God’s Word that *baptism cannot save your soul.*

Dear friend, remember your sins. Do not hide them. Say humbly, like David, “I acknowledge my

transgressions: and my sin is ever before me;" "I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sins." (Psalm 51.3 and 38.18). Know that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51.17.) For your own sake, dear reader, do not look at other peoples' mistakes. Look at your own heart. Realize how much *you* need to be saved from your sins. Recognise that in God's sight you are sick and blind and naked. Come to your Saviour, who loved you and died for you upon the Cross. Call upon the Lord Jesus. He will have compassion on you, heal you, open your eyes and clothe you with the garments of salvation. He will send you away rejoicing. He has said, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." (John 6.37.)

Now the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Love. We who have trusted in the Lord need to remind ourselves that it greatly grieves the Holy Spirit when the Lord's children enter into heated argument about such matters as baptism. Controversy is a mark of spiritual weakness which we should outgrow. (2 Tim. 2.24, 25). The Spirit of God constrains us to love one another, even though there may be things on which for a time we disagree. (Rom. 14. 2, 3, 5, 17, 19.) Matters such as these must be approached with love and patience and in a spirit of prayer, without which they cannot be helpful and will rather do damage to our spiritual life.

We earnestly desire, therefore, to stand clear of controversy; and yet, under a strong sense of the need for light from God's Word to be shed upon this subject, and to dispel the confusion that exists in

many minds, we have felt constrained to write this booklet. In doing so our prayer for God's people is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. 3. 17-19.)

Finally I would like to add a personal word. In the preparation of this booklet I have had the help and advice of a number of the Lord's servants, among whom I must mention especially Dr. A. I. Kinnear whose assistance in revising and rearranging the material I have greatly valued. I desire to thank all who have thus contributed to the work by prayer and in practical ways, but most of all our Lord Jesus Himself, apart from whom nothing would have been possible. There can be no effective work for Him that does not first of all owe everything to Him.

Yours in His fellowship,

C. E. D.



## INTRODUCTION

In the First Book of Samuel we read how, in response to the appeal of His people, God gave them a king. Through His servant Samuel He anointed Saul the Benjamite to be the first king over Israel. This anointing carried with it high privileges and responsibilities: and yet even kings are subject to the law of God, and there was at least one thing from which Saul was prohibited by that law. His royal anointing did not qualify him to perform the duties of a priest. These duties were reserved by God for those who were specially separated by Him for the purpose. They alone could represent the people in this office.

But there came a day when Saul was confronted with a severe test of his faith. Conditions were serious, for the Philistines were gathered against Israel who were scattering for fear of them, and appropriate military action was held up by the necessity for sacrifice to the Lord, for which the presence of Samuel was indispensable. Impatient of the delay, and lacking the faith to await God's instrument and God's time, Saul took the law into his own hands and, usurping the function of the priest, himself offered a burnt offering. Samuel, arriving on the scene immediately afterwards, said to Saul, "Thou hast done foolishly," and there followed a very severe judgment

of God upon the king for his presumption. Saul had overstepped the limits set by God for him in His Word, solely because he looked at the circumstances and allowed his own judgment to guide him. (1 Samuel 13.)

To us who preach Christ, and Him crucified, God has set limits also. "If any man speak, let him speak according to the oracles of God." (1 Peter 4.11.) Yet down the centuries, despite the repeated warnings of God's messengers, His people have again and again fallen to the temptation to be governed by expediency and prevailing custom, and to be guided not by the Scriptures, but, like Saul, by their own (albeit well-intentioned) judgment.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding." (Prov. 3.2.) "To the law and to the testimony: if (men) speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. 8.20.) "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the way, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But ye say, we will not walk therein." (Jer. 6.16.)

Such are the warnings the Lord has given us. It is our desire therefore to declare the Word of God, explaining it as the Holy Spirit helps us, with the humble prayer that nothing of man's weakness in us may hide the wisdom of God. May the Lord use this to shed His light upon the path of many of His children who wish to know and obey His will.

But some may ask: Should one spend time searching the Scriptures on the subject of baptism? Is it so important after all? Should we not occupy ourselves

wholly with Christ to the exclusion of all else? Is He not alone to hold our interest and are not other things unimportant by comparison? But wait a minute! What we feel to be unimportant is not necessarily so in God's eyes. Let us illustrate.

The Lord Jesus came to Jerusalem riding upon an ass. To honour Him men spread their garments in His path. The ass walked on them! They had indeed been spread, not for the ass's sake, but for the Lord's—placed there in recognition of His sovereign rights and Lordship—and yet, in the plan of God, an ass had perforce to trample upon them. For God Himself had declared through the prophet, "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting on an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass." (Matt. 21.5; compare Zech. 9.9.) Thus it is clear that the ass occupied an essential place in the fulfilment of prophecy, and, in the same way, seemingly secondary or outward things have an essential place to fill in our spiritual history.

Of course, were baptism but an invention of man it could hold no spiritual value at all. Its importance lies, as in the case of the ass, in *the place given to it in the Scriptures*. Every word is precious that comes from the mouth of Him who alone is worthy to be both Lord and King.

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6.46).

Finally, this is a matter of *revelation* from God to each one of His people. (Gal. 1.12) So we do not request you simply to accept what we say. By persuading you merely to adopt our viewpoint we should

not be helping you. Our prayer rather is that God may speak to you.

We ask you therefore to read on with patience, like the noble Bereans who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17.11) These men were perhaps sceptical at first, but their nobility lay in their determination to find out for themselves what the Scriptures in fact had to say on the questions raised. Doing so they came to decisions that were based upon personal revelation from the Word of God.

Will you follow their example studying the Bible, looking up each verse quoted and weighing its implication? Will you read also, like them, "with readiness of mind;" that is with a mind unfettered by circumstances, traditions, or the practices prevailing now or in the past? Face courageously the fact that such an attitude may bring you into conflict with great men of God such as William Booth, who held that baptism was not necessary at all, or John Wesley, who was convinced of the rightness of infant baptism. Would it be presumptuous to reach a conclusion differing from these?

Remember David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, whom the Lord called "a man after mine own heart." The Scripture does not gloss over the failures even of such a man. One among them was his failure (in which others followed him) to put an end to the worship of Moses' serpent of brass, to which, we are told in 2 Kings 18.4, the children of Israel were burning incense even in his days. How could one such as David fail in this? And why, too, should Hezekiah, a far less glorious king than David or Solomon and

one concerning whom perhaps most of us can remember little of note, have been the one privileged to deal with this heathenish practice, and destroy that which, having once served its purpose, had become a snare to Israel?

Surely it teaches us this, that even servants of God may err, and it may please God to give lesser men a greater revelation. God's Word makes it clear that the greatest of men are fallible; for all are but "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us." (2 Cor. 4.7)

Now when we have our eyes too much on men we are liable to repeat those men's mistakes. It is when we look to the Lord that mistakes begin to be corrected. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. 3.1)

## From the Gospels

The revelation given to us on the subject of Baptism in the New Testament, as with all other Christian doctrines, is a progressive one. In the Gospels some first principles are laid down by the Holy Spirit either in the Lord's own words or by example. In the Acts these are illustrated in the practice and preaching of the early Church. In the Epistles the principles and practice are further developed so that their inner meaning becomes clear to us.

We shall study the passages chronologically in the Gospels and Acts and in the order of their occurrence in the Epistles, and shall seek to discover the spiritual and practical lessons of each passage as we go forward.

### **"Confessing their sins"**

#### **The Baptism of John the Forerunner**

Matt. 3.1-12., Mark 1.4-8., Luke 3.1-19.,  
John 1.6-7, 15, 19-28 and 3.22-30.

Matt. 3.6. *"Then went out to him (people from) Jerusalem and all Judaea and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins."* (Cf. Mark 1.5)

Here first of all we note the reason and the method.

(a) Who were baptized? Those who confessed their sins. This implies repentance. Baptism was for those who had repented of their sins and had made confession of them to God.

(b) They were baptized "in Jordan;" that is, by taking their place with John "in the river." (Mark 1.5) This suggests that the method was immersion.

John 3.23. *"And John also was baptizing in Enon near to Salim, because there was much water there; and they came and were baptized."*

This (somewhat later) reference to John's baptism serves to strengthen the view that John's practice was to baptize the people by immersion in the river, for why else should he seek a place where there was "much water?" We will just note the fact here; its implications will become clearer later.

Matt. 3.7. *"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* (Cf. Luke 3.7)

The Lord Himself tells us that most of the Pharisees and Sadducees "rejected the baptism of John." (Luke 7.30) But even some of those who came were apparently refused baptism. John was extremely violent in his criticism of them. "O generation of vipers!" he said. The next verse indicates clearly that one reason for this was their unreadiness to repent. Evidently those who have not reached such a state of heart are to be refused baptism.

Matt. 3.8. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." (Cf. Luke 3.8)

More is demanded than only repentance. We are to bear fruits that befit repentance. Turning away from the life of sin and falsehood, walking according to the law of God, forgiving freely all who have wronged us, being willing to ask forgiveness of any whom we have hurt, young or old, rich or poor, such are the evidences God requires. Alas, how many of those baptized today in fact fulfil these conditions?

Matt. 3.9. "And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Cf. Luke 3.8)

All Jews, as children of Abraham, shared in the covenant of which circumcision was the sign. These Pharisees made the mistake of thinking that, in the same way, every child of Abraham was automatically eligible for John's baptism. John is at pains to make clear the essential difference that, unlike circumcision, baptism was not given on grounds of birth, but was conditional upon repentance for sins.

The similar fault in much Christian thinking is clear today. Many Christians have the same mistaken idea that baptism is on grounds of birth into a Christian family. But in fact, just as circumcision was a sign that followed natural birth into the family of Abraham, so Christian baptism is a mark of those who have been *born again* into the family of God. So a child should not be baptized just because he is born of Christian parents.

He can and should however be brought to the Lord for blessing and for prayer, that the work of His grace



may early begin to be manifested in his life. The Lord called the little children to Him and laid His hands on them and blessed them. But He did not baptize them. (Matt. 19. 14-15., Mark 10.14-16.)

Matt. 3.11. "*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 baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*" (Cf. Mark 1.8)

John's baptism is not to be completely identified with Christian baptism. It was given by God for a transition period in which everything *looked forward* (1) to the death and resurrection of Christ and (2) to the "baptism" of believers with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost which was to follow His exaltation. This experience of baptism with the Holy Ghost was still future to them. It awaited the day when the Lord Jesus should ascend to His Father, His redemptive work completed. (John 16.7., Acts 2.33).

But the Cross of Christ lies no longer in the future but in the past, and every experience of our Christian life derives its value from the fact that that work is done. From Pentecost onwards every believer, at new birth, is baptized by the Holy Spirit into one Body (1 Cor. 12, 13) and the testimony of baptism in water that follows, *looks back* to the Cross, even as John's baptism looked forward to it.

Always in the New Testament we shall find baptism by the Spirit and baptism in water closely related, the one a blessed experience, the other a step of public testimony. But for us now the experience precedes the testimony. (Compare the account of the Gentile converts at Caesarea in Acts 10.47, 48).

“Thus it becometh us”

## The Obedience of the Son of God

Matt. 3.13 to 4.1., Mark 1. 9-13., Luke 3. 21-22 and  
4. 1-3., John 1. 29-34.

Matt. 3. 13, 14. *“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?”* (Cf. Mark 1.9, Luke 3.21.)

The Lord Jesus in coming to John acknowledges a mere man as the divinely appointed instrument in co-operation with whom He is to obey His Father's will in the step of baptism. This wonderfully reveals His humility.

The Lord's behaviour might well cause us surprise, as it did to John. It is no easy thing to submit to such humiliation. It touches our pride, and many of us have felt like saying, “We will gladly submit to God, but never to a human instrument. The Lord Himself has baptized us with the Holy Spirit; so what need have we to be baptized in water by a man?” Thus we seek to escape the indignity by evading the issue. To all such reasoning God's Word supplies the answer. In Acts 10. 47, 48 Peter says of believers who had manifestly received the baptism of the Holy Spirit: “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

Matt. 3.15. *“And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.”*

The Lord Jesus shows us the way. He had come to fulfil all righteousness, and could not willingly leave out even the outward sign of baptism if it were included in the plan of God.

In His words, "Thus it becometh us," He draws you and me into company with Himself. Would we prefer to be excluded from this blessed fellowship? Would we not rather follow in His steps and fulfil all righteousness?

Matt. 3.16. *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him."* (Cf. Mark 1.10., Luke 3.22, 23.)

"He went up." How could He go up, except He had first gone down? See Ephesians 4.9 and 10. His going down into the water signified that He had come to die and to be buried and to descend into the lower parts of the earth, for the sake of our sins. His coming up out of the water signified that then He would rise again from the dead as the victorious Son of God, and "ascend up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." (Eph. 4.10) By baptism the Lord was saying: I submit to the Father's will in all these things. I voluntarily take this course.

So in baptism we also may say: My old sinful nature has come under judgment and is dead and buried with Christ, but now I am risen with Him to walk in newness of life. (Eph. 2. 5, 6, Rom. 6.4)

Matt. 3.17. *“And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* (Cf. Mark 1.11., Luke 3.22).

Three events accompanied the Lord's baptism. The heavens were opened to Him: the Spirit of God descended and alighted upon Him; and a Voice was heard from heaven affirming the Father's pleasure in the Son. So His baptism was marked as a matter of heavenly and divine concern.

But as it was openly and publicly with Him, so it is inwardly and spiritually—but no less really—with us. The following references explain this. For in baptism the new believer is reminded, first, that now the heavens are opened to him by the blood of Christ (Heb. 10. 19-20), secondly, that now the Holy Spirit of God has come to dwell in him (1 Cor. 6. 19), and thirdly, that the Father has acknowledged him openly as His child. (Gal. 3.26., John 15. 16 and 19).

Matt. 4.1. *“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.”* (Cf. Mark 1.12, 13., Luke 4. 1, 2).

After baptism there follows a vigorous attack from Satan. While other verses make it clear that baptism follows just after repentance, here we note that it comes just at the outset of the life and fight of faith. This is altogether true to Christian experience. Many only begin to know what is meant by spiritual warfare when they have publicly taken this step of witness to the Lord. So after baptism be prepared for spiritual battles! Put on the whole armour of God. (Eph. 6. 10-20).

**"From heaven or of men?"**

**Christ's View of John's Baptism.**

Luke 7.24-30., Matt. 21.23-27., Mark 11.27-33.,  
Luke 20.1-8.

Luke 7.29.30. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God, being not baptized of him."

These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus Himself in the course of a discourse in which He gives us His own estimate of John the Baptist and his ministry (v. 24ff.) In them He distinguishes two attitudes to baptism represented by two groups of people:

(a) All the people and the publicans who "justified God." These have their counterpart today. In baptism we say: God is perfectly just, but I am a sinner. Those who have truly repented, and they alone, can say that acceptably to God.

(b) The Pharisees and lawyers who "rejected the counsel of God." Note these words. The Lord Jesus clearly does not treat baptism lightly or regard it as optional, but Himself includes it in the consequences of obedience to the *counsel of God*. If this is so, dare we regard it as less important? Dare we risk being among those who reject God's counsel?

Matt. 21.25. "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or of men? (Cf. Mark 11.30, Luke 20.4).

This, with the preceding verse, forms part of the reply of the Lord Jesus to the challenge of the chief

priests and elders of the temple: "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" His reply, though referring to John's baptism, was, of course, equally applicable to that which He Himself instituted. It was in the form of a question, and one which can be asked with equal relevance of any "Christian" institution or ordinance. "Is it from heaven or of men?" That is the test.

Ask it of any form of baptism of which you know: (a) the baptism of infants; (b) baptism of those who have been taught the Lord's prayer and the ten commandments, and perhaps a few other things, but who are not yet born from above; (c) baptism of Christian believers who themselves know, by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, that they are born again (1 John 5.10), and who, though facing thereby persecution and exclusion from their community (Matt. 5.11), are eager to testify through baptism that they are now children of God by new birth.

Possibly you may feel that the last is clearly the best, but that the others are not too bad. God does not invite comparisons. His question is absolute: "From heaven? Or of men?" For what is of Heaven will stand before God, but what is of man's devising He cannot accept, and it is therefore not for us.

Matt. 21. 25, 26. "*And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven: he will say unto us: Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.*" (Cf. Mark 11. 31-32., Luke 20. 5-6).

We cannot help pitying these men as they struggle vainly to devise a reply with which no one can find

fault. They were indeed in a predicament, for they could not face the consequences of the right answer. If it was really from Heaven, then logically priests of the temple though they be, must submit to the indignity of baptism at the hands of one so unorthodox. This was too much for them. People might call John a prophet, and flock to his preaching, but they did not recognise him as such. He might preach in the wilderness, but let him not bring his teaching of repentance and baptism into their places of worship!

Yet standing there before the Lord Jesus they had not the courage to say, "We do not recognise John as a prophet from God." His undoubted effectiveness was what embarrassed them. Men *were* in fact repenting and their lives were being changed. In the popular judgment John was indeed a prophet, and these priests feared the people. So they were driven to an evasion—a lie, in fact. "And they answered Jesus and said: We cannot tell." (Verse 27).

Matt. 21.27. "*And he said unto them: Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*" (Cf. Mark 11.33., Luke 20.8).

Such an attitude of heart as these priests manifested is the one sure way of closing the door to divine revelation. Do we want to know the secret of that wonderful authority that marked all the words and works of the Lord Jesus? Then let us say with Joshua: "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" Or let us be like Paul, who "trembling and astonished said: What wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said: Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

The Lord did not leave the choice to Paul. He would be told, and he must obey. Are we willing to obey God if He speaks to us? If we are, and only so, He will begin to unfold to us the secrets of His exaltation and the power and authority of His Name.

So now, dear reader, the same question is put to you: The baptism of repentant, born-again believers, is it from Heaven, or of men? What will be your answer? If indeed it be from Heaven, will you not then take the step without further delay, if you have not already done so? The Lord is speaking to you now.

**“The baptism that I am baptized with”**

**The Sufferings and Death of the Lord Jesus**

Luke 12.49, 50., Matt. 20.20-23., Mark 10.35-40.

Luke 12.50. *“I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened until it be accomplished!”*

Matt. 20.22, 23. *“And Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they say unto him: We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptised with.”* (Cf. Mark 10.38, 39).

These words of the Lord Jesus provide us with the key to the deepest meaning of baptism. The Lord uses the word “baptism” here to describe an experience that He has yet to go through in the future. This is therefore not His baptism in the waters of Jordan by John, which was past. He can only refer here to His actual sufferings and death on the Cross, and His resurrection and ascension. This is clear from His previous words in Matt. 20.18-19.



It is His Cross to which He is earnestly looking forward, because only after it is accomplished can He shed forth the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, whereby limitation will give place to a release of His life and power into the Church which is His heavenly and spiritual Body. So it is to His Cross that His baptism in Jordan points forward.

So also it is to His Cross and glorious resurrection that all baptisms of Christian believers look back. All who take this step do so because by faith they have become sharers in the "baptism" of His death and resurrection; for this use of the word by the Lord shows us that He regards baptism in water as symbolic of our identification with Him in that greater "baptism" of His death, burial and risen life.

In baptism therefore we remind the new believer that he is testifying to his union with the Lord Jesus Christ in His Cross (Rom. 6.3,4) and that *he has a share with Him now in His sufferings* (Phil. 3. 10, 11., Col. 1.24). The Lord Himself takes account, too, of this testimony, and accordingly makes His Cross the basis of all His dealings with the believer who has so testified (2 Cor. 4. 7-11., Gal. 2.20., Luke 12. 51-53). He will indeed drink of his Lord's cup, and be baptized with his Lord's baptism, and he should not be surprised if it is so.

### **"Baptizing them in the Name"**

#### **The Lord's Command to His Disciples**

Matt. 28.16-20., Mark 16.14-18.

Matt. 28, 18, 19. *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying: All power is given unto me in heaven*

and in earth; go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

(a) "Make disciples."

This great commission of the Lord Jesus to His disciples includes the command to "go.... and teach.... baptizing." The word "teach" is also translated "make disciples" and implies the bringing of men and women into direct personal touch with the Saviour.

For me to be made a disciple will mean that there has been repentance and faith in the atoning blood of Christ, leading me to the full assurance (Heb. 10.22) through the Holy Spirit's witness in my heart (1 John 5.10) that my sins are forgiven, and that I have received eternal life in Jesus my Lord. This believing "to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10-19) gives me an indescribable joy (1 Peter 1.8) which is one mark by which true conversion and new birth are recognised. Such a one is to be baptized.

(b) "In the Name."

To be baptized "in the Name" is a mighty thing. It is not a step to be taken lightly. It means that, if my testimony is a genuine one and the above things are true of me, all the resources of the Godhead are released on my behalf. God's invitation to me to be baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost implies His desire that I should realise my intimate relationship with the triune God, because :

(1) The Father owns me as His child, and delights to be called: "Abba, Father." (Rom. 8.15) What a blessed relationship!

(2) The Son has now become my Saviour; and more than that: my Shepherd, Lover, Husband, Brother, Lord and King. "My Beloved is mine and I am His." (Song of Solomon 2.16) These facts will come to have increasing meaning to me as I go on to know Him.

(3) The Holy Spirit has become my constant Comforter. He is my Indweller (1 Cor. 6.19) my Law-giver (Rom. 8.2) my Instructor (1 John 20. 20, 27) and the Inspirer of my prayers. (Rom. 8.26).

(c) *"All power is given unto Me."*

To be baptized into this Name is to come under the absolute authority of the risen Lord Jesus (to whom all authority is given) and to enjoy from now on all the increasing values of His protection and His empowering for service.

Matt. 28.20. *"And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

These wonderful words were addressed to the disciples in Galilee, who were themselves to "make disciples." If I therefore become a disciple of the Lord Jesus and am baptized into His Name, I am assured of the unfailing presence with me—to the end—of my all-powerful Lord. What matters it, therefore, if I am beset with the wiles of Satan, the power of this wicked world, the hostility of men and the criticism and misrepresentation of undiscerning friends? If God be for me, who can be against me? (Rom. 8.31) "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." (Psalm 56.11).

Mark 16.16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

We have seen the Lord's instructions to His servants in this new age to *teach* and to *baptize* (Matt. 28. 18-20). Here we have the responsibility placed upon the *hearers* of the message to *believe* and to *be baptized*. Salvation depends upon living faith, and it is assumed here that this will quite naturally lead on to the testimony of baptism. Alas, how often it does not, and, while we would not dare to attach an importance to baptism which scripture does not give it, by making it necessary to salvation, we do confidently assert that *its omission may lead to a serious limitation of our present enjoyment of the values of that salvation.*

Here are two aspects of Christian responsibility laid upon us by the Lord in these two resurrection passages. If the teacher cannot evade his responsibility to baptize, neither can the hearer escape, without loss, his corresponding duty to witness to His Lord in baptism.

## From the Book of the Acts

We move on now to lessons contained in the actual preaching and practice of the New Testament Church on the subject of baptism. We should study carefully the full story from which each of the following passages is quoted.

### Repentance

Acts 2.38. *“Peter said unto them: Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*

Acts 2.41. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day were added unto them about three thousand souls.”*

Look at the whole sermon. What did Peter preach? He preached first Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and exalted; then repentance unto remission of sins, to be followed by baptism.

What did they do? They evidently understood the purport of the message for they gladly received the Word and were baptized. The preaching and the result are consistent with what we have seen hitherto. Here

in Jerusalem repentance is emphasized as the prelude to baptism.

### Faith

Acts 8.12. "*When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*"

These Samaritans believed the good tidings which Philip preached and as a result they were baptized. "Men and women" are mentioned, implying that they were people of an age to understand and respond to revelation concerning the exaltation of the Lord Jesus and His coming kingdom and to put their faith in Him. It is to be noted that, were the Holy Spirit intending to include children in this statement, he might be expected expressly to mention them as He does in Matthew 14.21. Their omission from this and from *all other passages* relating to baptism clearly defines "believers" as those of an age sufficient to exercise a personal faith and conscience.

This is important and leads us directly to a consideration of certain other passages which come under this head. The following five incidents, four in the Acts and one in First Corinthians, are grouped together here because they each illustrate the work of grace in believing households.

Acts 10.44-48. (At Caesarea, where Cornelius had called together his kinsmen and near friends to hear the word of God) "*the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word....Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which*

have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

Acts 16.14, 15. (At Philippi) “a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying. If we have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

Acts 16. 32, 33. (Again at Philippi) “they spake unto (the jailor) the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.”

Acts 18.8. (At Corinth) “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized.”

1 Corinthians 1.16. “I baptized also the household of Stephanas.” Ch. 16.15. “Ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.”

In the above five instances we are given an account of the baptism of whole households together at one time. Because great importance has been attached to this fact it is necessary for us to look at the passages closely.

For example some have sought to find here evidence that when the head of a house believed and

was baptized, others were baptized at the same time simply on the ground that they were in his home or family, and regardless of whether or not they repented and believed. This held therefore to justify those instances in India where a Hindu has accepted Christianity and eventually his wife and all dependents have been baptized with him, even though they themselves lacked any personal experience of the Lord. Wives have been baptized through the persuasion of Christian husbands, and husbands through the persuasion of Christian wives, even though they had never repented or believed unto salvation. Yet how can such baptisms have any real meaning, lacking as they do the inward reality and power to give meaning to the outward testimony?

Again, some argue from these "household baptisms" that a family implies, and therefore demands, the presence of children, and they seek to derive from this scriptural support for infant baptism. Let us, then, look carefully at the wording of these passages:

*"The Holy Ghost fell on all them (at Caesarea) that heard the word."*

*"The Lord opened (Lydia's heart) that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And she was baptized and her household."*

*"They spake unto (the jailor) the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."*

*"Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house."*

*"The household of Stephanas have set themselves to minister unto the saints."*



In every single case (with the sole exception of Lydia's household) there is evidence of personal responsibility on the part of all the persons involved. They have the Word preached to them, or they believe, or the Holy Ghost comes upon them, or, in the case of Stephanas, they soon become known for hospitality. Only in the case of Lydia are we not specifically told that, as a necessary prelude to baptism, all her household followed her in their response to the things spoken by Paul, yet even here we might argue from Philippians 1.1 and 5, that "all the saints" in Philippi were at least old enough to have fellowship with Paul in the Gospel "from the first day," which was, of course, the day of Lydia's conversion. Yet the whole case for the baptism of infants, and (when convenient) of unbelievers, is made to stand or fall upon this one piece of evidence.

In fact it is a very weak argument from silence. Because it doesn't say there were not infants in these families, we are asked to conclude that there *must have been*, and therefore that they were baptized. But if we argue thus from what the Scripture *does not say* we may prove almost anything. (Scripture of course does not, in fact, tell us whether Lydia was unmarried, married, or a widow!) Our duty however is to attend to what God *does* say. And He says "make disciples and baptise them." (Matt. 28.19) and "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16.16).

In all faithfulness to those who sincerely practise it, we have to judge the case for infant baptism not only on the ground of the scriptures but by its results. One at least of the great mission "Churches" holds that

infants of believing parents who are baptized are thereby made "regenerate." In fact, experience shows that this teaching leads only to a false security, whereby the "Christian" who has once been so baptized regards himself as thereby exempt from any further need of new birth, with the result that he may never come to a living knowledge of the Saviour and the joy of salvation. He merely helps to swell the great class of nominal "Christians" with all the tragic consequences that follow to the life of the Church.

The sad logic of this unscriptural procedure leads to the unnatural conclusion that infants who are not baptized, are not born again, and have therefore no place in Heaven. In keeping with this, if they die their burial place must be kept separate, outside the "sacred" part of the cemetery and in unholy ground. And there are thousands of people who accept all this teaching and never ask, "What does the Bible say?"

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5.31) This was God's verdict two thousand five hundred years ago. It is the same today. Surely "the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. 1.9)

Yet how slow we are to take warning!

What then of our children? What provision does God make for them, and what is our responsibility toward them?

"Children are an heritage of the Lord." (Psalm 127.3) They are given to us in trust for Him, and as with all that He gives us, it is proper to present them

to the Lord. As Mary brought her Child to Jerusalem and presented Him to the Lord, so we as believing parents should, at a convenient time, bring our infants into the midst of our fellow-believers and present them to the Lord with prayer and thanksgiving.

Thereafter a responsibility rests upon us to bring them up in the nurture of the Lord and in the knowledge of His Word, so that the ground of their heart is prepared to receive the seed of the living Word through the Holy Spirit's working. We should explain to them, as they grow, the corruption of our Adamic nature, and the atoning power of the blood of Christ, and tell them of God's promise of the forgiveness of all our sins if we confess them and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. (1 John 1.9., John 6.47) For years they only listen without revelation from God. (1 Cor. 2.14) Then one day, perhaps, the Spirit of God breaks them down. At the Cross they recognise their sinfulness. Psalm 51 becomes the sincere prayer of their hearts, and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ they are saved. (Acts 16.31) As we watch them, we can see it is a genuine work of God. Now they are able to understand something of the meaning of baptism, and as they begin to know the Word of God, they themselves show an eagerness to obey it and to be baptized. Thus their baptism becomes full of meaning to themselves and to others.

Where parental pressure is put upon them, children who are not born again may all too easily consent to be baptized. Such baptisms, as we have seen, are meaningless and are a contradiction. They are worse, for they place young people in a false position, and parents cannot be too strongly warned *not to bring*

pressure to bear upon their children, but to commit them to the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. In this, as in much else, we need, as parents, to seek the Lord constantly for great wisdom and discernment to fulfil effectually the trust that He has committed to us in our children.

### **Individual Responsibility**

Acts 8.26. *“And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water: and the eunuch said: See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”*

This highly-placed servant of the Ethiopian queen was already a seeker, a worshipper at Jerusalem and now meditating in the scriptures on his homeward way. To this prepared soul Philip preaches Jesus as the “righteous servant” of the Lord, (Isa. 53.11) crucified for the sins of His people. After believing (and evidently having been told of the Lord’s command) the Ethiopian takes the initiative and himself asks for baptism. This joyful spontaneity, all too rare in these days, would be more common, where the whole subject of baptism not carefully avoided by many of the Lord’s servants.

Moreover he is impatient of delay. Why should he not obey the Lord immediately? And indeed there is no ground for delay when the believer sees the need for, and the significance of, baptism. Yet many to-day lack just that spirit of ready obedience, manifest in the Ethiopian as an example and encouragement to us all.

Acts 8.37. *“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

These words (though omitted in some ancient manuscripts, and so not in the Revised Version) are so entirely in keeping with the whole spirit of the New Testament teaching on the subject of baptism that we have taken the title of this book from them. "If thou believest" indeed "thou mayest."

It is from the heart, the whole heart, that faith goes out to God. This man's words were no mere lip-profession nor the fruit of an intellectual grasp of truth. It could have been said of him, as it was of Peter, "Blessed art thou.... for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 16.17) His heart had been touched and it was with his heart that he responded.

### Obedience

Acts 9.18. *"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized."*

We shall study later Paul's own account of this Damascus incident when we come to Acts 22. Here we take note of just one thing. Bringing the two passages together we get the following: Ananias' words were: "Now... arise, and be baptized." (22.16) "And immediately (Saul) arose and was baptized." (9.18)

He did not question, nor did he make excuse. We might justly infer from the account that it never entered his head to do so. This was a command from the Lord, even Jesus, Who had appeared unto him (9.17), and without hesitation he went forward in obedience to that command. From the moment when

Saul used the words: "Who art thou, Lord?" he had capitulated to Him, and never again would he defy that Lordship.

### **The Gift of the Holy Spirit**

Acts 10.47, 48. *"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."*

Looking again for a moment at this the fifth incident in the Acts in which baptism is referred to, we see that it enshrines another principle. The blessed presence of the Holy Spirit is here seen to be an accompaniment of their salvation, and the consequences of this were significant.

Peter and his companions, being Jews, might have felt that these Gentile believers should first become Jewish proselytes through circumcision and conformity to the law before they could become Christians and be added to the Church. But the Holy Spirit, by taking the initiative and coming Himself upon these believing Gentiles, so clearly disposed of all such arguments that the beholders were fully convinced. So Peter asks, "Can any man forbid water...?"

Nor were these men of Caesarea like some believers today who say, "We who have received baptism of the Holy Spirit, in itself so mighty an experience, what need have we to be baptized in water?" In their eyes the one did not exclude the other. Baptism was to them a command of God (compare verses 33 and 48) and they obeyed.

## The Name of the Lord Jesus

Acts 19.1-4 (Read these verses.)

Acts 19.5. *“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

We have seen already the interim character and the inadequacy of John's baptism. It was a baptism of repentance. (Acts 13.24) It looked forward with hope and expectancy to “Him which should come after, that is, Christ Jesus.” (Acts 19.4) and it had in view the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who was “not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7.39) There was something more to follow, and baptism “in the Name of the Lord Jesus” witnessed to the fact that the expectation had now been fulfilled. The work of salvation was completed, and the believer's faith rests now in the accomplished fact of Christ crucified, risen and exalted. His Name is above every name, and He has shed forth His Spirit upon all who trust in Him. In this day it is not necessary for anyone to be found in the halfway position of these men of Ephesus.

### Divine Election

Acts 22.12-16. *“Ananias.... said unto me.... The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

It is remarkable that throughout the Acts in every case of which we are given details, baptism follows immediately upon conversion—often the very same day. The longest interval is that of Paul who, we are told, waited three days, and that, surely, because only on the third day did Ananias speak to him about it. Then his question was, “Why tarriest thou?” and we know from Acts 9.18 that Paul waited no longer. Yet how many of us have put this question off, *even after* God has raised it with us as a definite requirement?

Here God seems also to emphasize the value of an instrument or messenger to draw our attention to this matter. So He may use one of His servants, or the Scriptures themselves, or even a book such as the one in your hand, to waken your consciousness to His voice. But we note too that, as with Ananias, the message to your heart will not be concerned exclusively with baptism itself, but will always relate it to the full purpose of God in Christ for you.

So Paul’s baptism is linked here with a remarkable revelation given to him through Ananias at this time. To Ananias God says, “He is a *chosen* vessel unto Me to bear My Name,” and addressing Paul, Ananias says, “God...hath *chosen* thee. Thou shalt be His witness.” These are great statements. But placing the verses quoted above (22.14-15) alongside other scriptures, we shall see that these announcements made to Paul concerning his own election to God’s service, are, in fact, privilege offered to *every* child of God who believes on Him.

We are chosen by God (1 Peter 2.9) and that not just now, as a kind of afterthought, but from the



foundation of the world. (Eph. 1.4) God has appointed us that we should know His will, (Ps. 32.8., Col. 1.9) that we should see the Righteous One, (2 Cor. 3.18) and that we should obey the voice of His mouth. (Isaiah 30.21., John 10.27., 15.10 and 14) And we too are to be His witness. (Acts 1.8., 22.20)

What a high and holy calling! (Eph. 1.18., 2 Tim. 1.9., Heb. 3.1) Yet all this is intimately bound up with our turning to the Lord. Do we welcome it? Are we ready to adjust our lives to that high standard and to direct all our energies to that goal? The testimony of baptism can be our way of telling the Lord that we will do so.

So Paul's baptism is linked here with a remarkable revelation given to him through Ananias at this time. In Acts 9 God says "He is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My Name", and addressing Paul, Ananias says "God hath chosen thee that thou shalt be His witness". These are great statements. But placing the verses quoted above (22.14-15) alongside other scriptures we shall see that these announcements made to Paul concerning his own election to God's service are in fact, privileges offered to every child of God who believes on Him.

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## From the Epistles

The Gospels have laid down for us some first principles of Baptism, and the Acts have illustrated the New Testament preaching and practice. Now the Epistles take us deeper into its meaning. We shall always find new significance in this simple testimony, not because it is anything in itself but because of the immense range of Divine revelation and activity to which it testifies.

So, in some of the following passages the word "baptism" is not always limited in meaning to the believer's outward testimony of baptism in water. It may sometimes refer also to the *realities* behind his testimony—the actual historic death and resurrection of the Lord with which he is united, or the baptism of the Holy Ghost Who has come into his life.

### **Romans : Deliverance unto life**

Romans 6:3-4. *"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."*

Baptism is "into Christ Jesus." (Verse 3) In it I declare that I am now, *in Christ*, a new creation. (2 Cor. 5.7) Further, it is "into His death." This means that I recognise my union with Him in death, the actual historic crucifixion of my old man with Him on the Cross, whereby the body of sin has been done away and I need no longer live a slave to sin. (Rom. 6.6) It is on the basis of this historic fact, wrought by God, that I can now reckon myself to be dead unto sin (Rom. 6.11) and choose to let sin reign in me no more. (Rom. 6.12)

But God has gone further still, and I have been buried with Christ. This old corrupt nature being put right away out of God's sight, I am now raised up with Him from the dead to walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6.4) It is God who has done this mighty thing, making possible in me the present daily experience of deliverance from sin. Daily I offer myself unto God as alive from the dead, and daily I yield my members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom. 6.13)

This truth, presented to us in Romans, represents a simple faith position testified to by baptism, but with what joyful and impressive consequences!

### **Corinthians : By one Spirit into one Body**

1 Cor. 1.12, 13. *"Every one of you saith, I..., I..., I..., I..., Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized into the name of Paul?"*

These words reveal a very serious weakness. Of course Christ is not divided. Of course the Lord Jesus, and not Paul, was crucified for us, and in His Name, and not Paul's we were baptized! This common fact

unites us all. Whether Paul or Peter or Apollos baptized the believers is immaterial. We all assent to this.

Yet how different is the reality! Through lack of heavenly vision many of us who are born-again Christians regard ourselves as belonging to this or that Society, or Mission, or denomination, or person by whom we were baptized. We will treat a fellow-believer next door as a stranger, desiring and offering little or no fellowship with him, because he is not "one of Us." Yet we join hands fervently with others far away because they are of "Our Mission."

This simply will not do. Did we really understand our heavenly calling, we could never allow such barriers to remain between the Lord's true children. It is the "I" that is the trouble. Only when we see by revelation that that "I" has been crucified, and that Christ risen has come to take its place (Gal. 2.20), will the way be open for the fulfilment of that wonderful prayer of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, "I pray for them... that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." (John 17.9 and 21)

1 Cor. 10.1, 2. *"All our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea: and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."*

This interesting passage re-emphasizes, by an Old Testament illustration, the historic fact of our union with Christ in death and resurrection, in which all of us who believe on Him are inescapably involved.

When Israel came out of Egypt after the passover two things happened to them. (a) They all "came under the cloud" whereby they lost their independence of movement; from now on, as the cloud led them so they had to move. (Exod. 13.21., 40.36, 37) (b) They all "passed through the sea," whereby in an act of faith they took the step forward that cut them off from the Egyptians for ever. (Exod. 14) In both of these respects they were united to Moses in a peculiar way, for he, who had himself been "drawn out" of the waters of death (as his name means, Exod. 2.10), had been appointed by God as their "deliverer" (Acts 7.35), in obedience to whom alone they could know God's salvation. After their *first* experience of salvation from judgment through the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb there followed this *second* experience of deliverance from Egypt by the hand of Moses, by their being brought under the cloud and through the water. Paul describes this as being "baptized unto Moses."

So now in the parallel New Testament experience of salvation followed by Christian baptism, the new believer is reminded that, having been saved from condemnation by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5.9), which corresponds to the Passover in Israel's case, he has been "baptized into Christ" and "united to Him" in death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6.4, 5) corresponding to the Israelites' experience under the cloud and in the sea. He has now turned his back finally and for good upon the old life of bondage to the world. In his new spiritual walk he is no longer independent and free to fulfil the desires of the flesh and the mind, but he is to walk in, and be led by, the Spirit of God (Rom. 8.12-14; Gal. 5.16, 22-25)

But also he is no longer independent of his fellow-believers, who, having passed through the sea with him, are also walking in relation to the cloud. If he fails to recognise the significance of either of these points he is in danger of falling short of the goal set before him, even as the Israelites perished in the wilderness. "And these things are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10.11)

1 Cor. 12.12, 13, "*For as the body is one...so also is Christ (Greek: "the Christ.") For by one Spirit are 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.*"

The solution to the Corinthian problem of strife and division, still so prevalent to-day, is again a *revelation of God's finished work in the Cross of Jesus Christ.*

We died with Christ as so many self-centred and self-sufficient individuals. We have risen with Him, but it is now Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2.20), and He is *one Christ*. He is not divided. (1 Cor. 1.13) Once we who are Christ's were strangers to one another. Now we all say alike, Christ is our life. (Col. 3.4) As sharers of the same life we have all been baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12.27), and are therefore members one of another.

The baptism of the Spirit by which this is brought about is an inward spiritual experience, bringing us into eternal relationship with one another in the Body of Christ, the Church, and of this also our baptism involves an outward symbol and witness. If we have testified to this we dare not live lives that contradict

it. We cannot go on living on that old sectarian and party ground, any longer. It will be death to us. "For as the (human) body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body: so also is *the Christ*." (1 Cor. 12.12 Greek) That Greek expression, "the Christ," clearly means here *Christ with His members*. How great the grace of God that includes us in such a title! And what treachery to Him if we live lives that are a denial of it!

### **Galatians : Putting on the New Man**

Gal. 3.27, 28. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one* (R.V. "one man") *in Christ Jesus.*"

Here in Galatians the positive fact of our relationship in the New Man is emphasized. We have been brought by resurrection into a fellowship in which national and social distinctions, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, are no more. They just do not exist in God's sight. Instead we are "in Christ Jesus," and in Him we are "all one Man." (Gal. 3.28, R.V.) *When we see that this is so* it becomes easy to live accordingly, far-reaching though the readjustments in our thinking and our attitudes may have to be. For it is God who has made us, in Himself, one New Man (Eph. 2.15), and our part is merely to respond by "putting on," or clothing ourselves with that New Man (Col. 3.10, 11), where Christ is all and in all.

## **Ephesians : Fellowship in the Throne**

Eph. 4.4-6. *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

In Ephesians Paul takes us further still, for here he shows us not only that we were raised together with Christ but also that we have been “made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2.5-6) He shows us something of the effect of our high station in Him upon hostile spiritual powers (Eph. 3.10, 6.12) and he details the special gifts made available to the Church as a consequence of His exaltation. (Eph. 4.10, 11)

In the verses quoted above, (Eph. 4.4-6) there are enumerated seven ties or unifying factors that bind us together. Seven always denotes perfection, and the mention of baptism as one of the seven emphasizes again its essential place in the perfect counsel of God.

Here the term “baptism” is an inclusive one. It means (a) the *experience* of being united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, which union becomes ours at conversion by the working of the Holy Spirit and is called in 1 Cor. 12.13 baptism in the Holy Spirit, and (b) the outward and symbolic *testimony* to the above by immersion in water. Both of these are included in the glorious words. “There is one baptism.”

## **Colossians : Fulness in Him**

Col. 2.10, 12. *“Ye are complete in him..... Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with*



him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

For many, burial means the end of everything. But for Christ, and those united to Him by faith, it is but the opportunity for God's new beginning by resurrection power, and it has a glorious end in view. Here in these verses, that end is stated to be our completeness (R.V. fulness.) Being buried and risen ye are complete in Him. Surely it is worth going the way of burial to attain such an end!

### Hebrews : On to Maturity

Heb. 6.1, 2. "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

Here are enumerated six elements in the Christian foundation which are stated to be *first principles of the doctrine of Christ*. They are given in the now familiar order, Repentance, Faith and then Baptism, and we are warned that we should not keep on learning and forgetting them, learning again and forgetting again, and so on. (Heb. 5.12) These first principles, though essential, are only a beginning, as the foundation is to a house. The stress here is on our *going on* to perfection, or full growth, as the word means. We are not to remain babes, constantly needing to be fed with milk, when "by reason of the times" we ought to have got far beyond this stage. We are urged to exercise ourselves in spiritual things as those who are of

full age, or mature. (Heb. 5.12-14) "Let us go on," says the apostle, and our hearts gladly reply, "This will we do."

### **Peter : The Living Hope**

1 Peter 3.18-22. *"Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:..... In the days of Noah (in the ark) eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven..."*

Read the whole passage carefully in order to understand the picture. On the ground of Christ's death and resurrection and of His presence now in heaven, "baptism doth also now save us." Christ is the ark, miraculously borne up by the waters that brought destruction and death to judged humanity, and in Him we are safe. We pass through the waters of death *with Him*. Baptism into Christ implies, further, an inward work, giving in our hearts "the answer of a good conscience." This we received, as Hebrews 9.14 tells us, by faith in the blood of Christ. Before we believed we had a bad conscience because of sins. Now however the blood of Christ has purged our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. As Peter says here, we are "saved."

What is the initial step of our salvation? Look back to 1 Peter 1.3. "God... hath begotten us again unto a living hope... unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." It begins then, at our new birth. It carries us right through all that we have seen to be symbolized in baptism, and it has in view a glorious triumphant end, when that salvation shall be revealed in all its fulness at His appearing. (Heb. 9.28)

## CHAPTER IV

### Summary

God's Word has led us through successive unveilings of His purpose for His children, in so far as it is linked in one way or another with the testimony of Baptism. Now we must return to some practical considerations, and seek to answer our questions in the light of our study.

#### Why should we be baptized at all?

- (a) It is commanded by the Lord. (Matt. 28.19, Mark 6.16)
- (b) It was practised by the New Testament Church. (Acts 2.41., 8.12, 38., 10.48., 16.15, 33)
- (c) The Lord Jesus includes it in "the counsel of God." (Luke 7.30)
- (d) The Lord Jesus Himself has laid down the example for us to follow. (Matt. 3.13., Luke 3.21)

#### How should we baptize?

- (a) God has given us baptism as a testimony—a symbolic action with a spiritual meaning—to help even the simplest believer to understand certain divine

things, much as we use objects as an aid in teaching children difficult lessons. It is clear that the immersion of the believer in water, and his being lifted out of it again by another, is intended by God to be a figure of his death, burial and resurrection with Christ, and that Scripture in a number of places lays emphasis on this meaning of the act. Romans 6.3, 4 and Colossians 2.12 are verses which especially stress this.

Some have held that baptism by pouring water over the believer expresses the Divine out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon him, but this is not, in fact, the emphasis that the Scripture makes. The method of sprinkling with water and marking with the sign of the cross on the forehead, as practised by some, finds no support whatever in scripture.

Unquestionably baptism by immersion is a "figure of the true," leading the thoughts of the participant and of the witnesses away from the act itself, to the thing testified to, even the Cross of Christ and His triumph over Satan and death.

(b) In the Bible there is strong evidence that the actual New Testament practice was to baptize by immersion. We read in Matt. 3.16 that "Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water." In Acts 8.38 also, "They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip..." This entry "into the water" together with the apparent need of "much water" for baptism (John 3.23) implies that immersion was the form practised.

(c) The Greek word *baptizo* has the following meanings in classical Greek (Liddell and Scott's

Lexicon): "to dip in or under water," "to sink a ship," "to drench or make thoroughly wet with water," "to draw liquid from a vessel by dipping a cup into it." While the word may have been capable of wider colloquial meanings Greek scholars agree that the dominant sense is to plunge, submerge or immerse in water, and that the sense of sprinkling with water is not included.

### **Who should be baptized ?**

The testimony of baptism is for those who have confessed their sins and shown fruits that befit repentance (Matt. 3.6, 8), those who have been made disciples by being brought into personal touch with the Saviour (Matt. 28.19), those who have gladly received the word of the Gospel (Acts 2.41). Those who have believed on the Son of God with all their hearts (Acts 8.47). All who know they are born again fulfil these conditions.

Now you may ask, how can the Lord's servant be sure that those who come to him and ask for baptism fulfil these conditions? Do we never make mistakes and baptize wrong persons? Yes, indeed, this is not impossible. Some have suggested that the strange case of Simon the sorcerer in Samaria (Acts 9.8-32) must have left the apostles asking themselves this very question. However that may be, we may sometimes encounter persons concerning whom we may have reason to question the reality of their testimony, and to ask ourselves afterwards whether they were in fact truly born again. We cannot pretend to infallibility, and must occasionally encounter problems which we have to leave between the one concerned

and God, where, after all, the real issue hangs. But when we act prayerfully, realizing our responsibility and seeking to walk humbly with the Lord in this matter, such cases become increasingly rare.

### **When should we be baptized ?**

It is very evident that in the New Testament the testimony of baptism followed very quickly after the expression of faith in the Saviour. Usually it was the same day. There is nothing to suggest postponement until there was a measure of maturity of spiritual life. The testimony can clearly be borne at the earliest opportunity when once a saving faith in the Lord Jesus is clearly manifest.

### **What is the meaning of baptism ?**

To answer this question would be to recapitulate much that we have already written. Let us however attempt a concise statement. In my baptism, then, I proclaim (a) that I am united by faith with my Lord in His atoning and representative death, burial and resurrection, (Romans 6.3, 4., Colossians 2.12) and (b) that, having been born of the Spirit, (John 3.5, 6) my heart can respond now to God, from a conscience purged by His blood. (Heb. 9.14., 1 Peter 3.21)

### **What is the importance of the occasion of baptism ?**

(a) It is witnessed by God. He openly acknowledges me as His child in whom He finds pleasure, not on the ground of what I am in myself, but because, in my act of obedience to Him, He sees me in Christ, the One who has fully satisfied Him.

(b) It is witnessed by the angels in heaven with rejoicing. (1 Peter 3.21, 22., Luke 15.10)

(c) It is witnessed with deep concern by Satan, because in my baptism I proclaim my liberation from his power, and my victory over him through Christ my Saviour, who Himself "having spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross." (Col. 2.12-15) Seeing this Satan will attack me with renewed vehemence (Matt. 4.1), but I am safe in Christ my Lord. (Zech. 2.8., John 10.28)

(d) It is witnessed by the world, both by strangers and by my friends near and far, for the news will spread like wild-fire. It is my testimony to them that I have now entered upon a new spiritual life in Christ. I have been redeemed from Satan's bondage; redeemed too from the rules and regulations of men as to religious practice; redeemed, in fact, from my vain conversation, received by tradition from my fathers. (1 Peter 1.18) From all these, praise God! my redemption is "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1.19) Henceforth this vain world with its sinful pleasures has no claim upon me, for I belong to Him, my Lord.

(e) It is witnessed, too, by my fellow-believers, with joy and thanksgiving to God for the mighty salvation He has wrought in me to bring me into His family, and for the opening of my heart to discover more of Himself through this testimony.



Dare we suggest for one moment that we have treated this subject fully? To those who sit at His feet the Lord will surely reveal many more precious lessons from it. To us it seems clear that in baptism God is but opening a window into His great treasure-house, that we might contemplate His dear Son, and enter more comprehendingly into the joy of His salvation.

We close with some words of the Lord Jesus Himself: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15.11)

May the Lord bless to you this meditation for His glory. Amen.

## About the Author



C. E. Dasan, the author, was born in a village in Tamil Nadu. As he was orphaned at a very early age, he was brought up at a hostel where spiritual values were inculcated in him.

He became a teacher after graduation. At the age of 25, by providence he met

Bro. Bakht Singh and through him he came to accept the Lord Jesus as his personal saviour.

In 1945, heeding to the call of God, he resigned his secular job and began to involve full time in Christian ministry with Bro. Bakht Singh. Besides being a preacher, Dasan also was very keenly associated with the literature ministry by writing articles in journals and magazines. He went to be with the Lord on October 23, 1985.

## If Thou Believest

Baptism is one of the most misunderstood, if not misinterpreted practices of Christianity. Most churches have become traditional-bound in this rather than trying to follow the true scriptural teaching.

The author is convincingly expounding what the Bible exactly teaches on Baptism which is the identification of the believer in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also he exposes that all types of baptismal practices except that of immersed baptism are unscriptural.