

BAPTISM

"They that gladly received his word were baptized . . . and they continued stedfastly . . ."

EDWIN
KIRK

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Introduction

Have there not been written books without number on this subject. Yes, writings, both of great length and shorter, have been put forth during the centuries. Has not the question been settled? Yes, as far as Holy Scripture is concerned, but the appeals have often been to sources outside Scripture, namely, to historical records, to "church authorities," to human reasoning, and to analogy with Old Testament types. This last may seem to be spiritual, and so it would be if the types were to be considered in their entirety, and every factor taken into account.

How many are relying upon their "baptism" in infancy in the various bodies of Christendom, both Protestant and otherwise! The practice is oft regarded with superstitious awe, and as having some saving efficacy, as though any act performed by the creature could rightly be added to the atonement made by the Lord Jesus Christ when He "poured out His soul unto death" at Golgotha.

In the following essay, the appeal will be solely to Holy Scripture. And why not? *Only* of the Book of God is it said, "All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,

for correction, for *instruction* which is in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Hence, there will be no references to works of men; not that the writings of godly men are undervalued, but because believers—especially those younger in the faith—need to learn to "prove all things" by Scripture. That alone stands as the court of appeal. If it be said—and it is quite true—what you are now sending forth is a work of man, the only reply can be, "Yes, but examine all its statements by searching the Scriptures whether these things be so" (Acts 17:11).

In the hope that readers will so act, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in John 17:17, this little book asks for a kindly reception. To God alone be glory.

The Word Used

Baptize, Baptist, Baptism, are not English words. Hence, although they have been anglicised, we must examine a Greek dictionary to find their real meaning. Liddell and Scott's Lexicon gives as the meaning of "Baptizo"—to dip repeatedly, to dip under, to bathe; "Baptistes" (a description of John the Baptist)—one that dips, a dyer. Another lexicon adds the verb, "to sink." "Bapto," whence "Baptizo" is derived, is rendered "to dip, to dye, to dip under, to sink." Now, whatever meanings have been attached to the word since the New Testament Scriptures were written, it does not appear

that it can be used other than in the sense "To immerse." "Sprinkling" or "pouring" cannot rightly translate the word as thus used in the original language of the New Testament; indeed, there are distinct words for both such actions, but they are not used for the act of water baptism.

The Idea of Immersion confirmed by the Inspired Record

John, we are told, baptized *IN* water (Matt. 3:11; John 1:26, 31, 33). Mark uses the instrumental dative case,* translated "with water." "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, *because* there was much water there" (John 3:23). At the baptism of the Lord Jesus, as recorded by Mark, it is said that, "*straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened*" (Mark 1:10). Matthew's words are "And Jesus, when He was baptised, *went up straightway away from the water*" (Matt. 3:16). The baptism of the Ethiopian is thus recorded in Acts 8:38-39). "*And 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 Phillip.*"

It would seem, then, quite clear that these baptisms were performed by a complete dipping under the water of the whole body. There would be no

*Sometimes translated "in."

need to go down into the water for a mere sprinkling or pouring. Nor for such acts as these latter would there be need of "much water." This cumulative evidence goes to prove that a true baptism can only be carried out by a complete immersion.

The Baptism of John

By this phrase is meant the baptism performed by John the Baptist. It is used by the Lord Jesus Himself (Mark 11:30). "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" That it was from heaven is confirmed by John's own words, "He (that is, God) That sent me to baptize" (John 1:33). Who were the subjects of this baptism? Those who were confessing their sins, who had heard the words, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand." Moreover, it was "unto" (or with a view to) the remission of sins (Mark 1:4-5). Not that this act could of itself procure forgiveness, but where there is a work of the Holy Spirit, producing repentance and confession, obedience to the Lord's command will result in an assurance of forgiveness. Did all who were baptized in Jordan prove themselves to be true disciples? That is impossible to tell. Simon Magnus was baptized but he showed afterwards that his heart was not right in the sight of God (Acts 8).

Very many obeyed the word of God through John, as the "people" and the "publicans." These,

hearing the words of the Lord Jesus, "justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:29-30). They were, as the Gospels testify so often, self-righteous, needing no repentance, and therefore not confessing their sins.

John's baptism was not an empty form. He ever pointed away from himself to the Son of God. It was with a view to the Lord Jesus he baptized, never in his own name (compare 1 Cor. 1:13-15). This is confirmed by Paul in Acts 19:4-5: "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him Which should come after him, that is on Christ Jesus, and, having heard (lit.) they (that is, those who heard John preaching) were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus." It cannot be proved beyond question that this last sentence (verse 5) applied to the twelve men at Ephesus. The two verses should be read together as a continuous narrative. These men evidently knew the Lord Jesus as Saviour, but being imperfectly taught, they needed further instruction as to the real meaning of their baptism, before receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. From the context it would appear that these men had become disciples (Acts 19:1) through the ministry of Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). This servant of God needed to know the way of

God more perfectly, prior to which his teaching lacked certain parts of truth which Aquila and Priscilla were able, by the grace of God, to impart to him.

The baptism of John did not differ essentially from that practised by the Lord's disciples (John 3:22; 4:1-2) or from that commanded by the Lord ere He ascended into heaven. The language used by Peter on the Day of Pentecost remarkably resembles that of John the Baptist (Acts 2:38). All baptism, rightly carried out, is "into the Name," not of men, but of God (Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:16).

The Lord Jesus was baptized by John in Jordan, at His own request. "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). He is seen in the midst of people confessing their sins. *He* had none to confess, *He* had no need of repentance, for *He* knew no sin. But did not this act on His part have in view His coming baptism under wrath, when the sins of His elect people would be laid upon Him? He Who restored that which He took not away had laid to His charge "the iniquity of us all." The sins of His chosen were imputed to Him, that He might bear the judgment due thereto. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50). Such a baptism meant for Him that "all Thy waves

and Thy billows have gone over Me" (Ps. 42:7). Thus also cried Jonah, of whose experiences the Lord Jesus spoke as a type of His own. (Jonah 2:3.) Well may the saved one rejoice in such a Saviour!

Types of Baptism

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that 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" (1 Cor. 10:1-2). It may be said, "How does this help to prove immersion?" Surely the language, "under" and "through," as well as the use of the word which we have seen means to immerse, cannot be made to mean anything otherwise. Moreover, were not the waters a wall each side of them and the cloud above them? If this is not a typical immersion, language ceases to have meaning?

Moses was the mediator, thus foreshadowing Christ. He had, by the hand of God, led a redeemed people (by the blood of the lamb) out of Egypt, and was still leading them to a new life of freedom and worship. The type is clear, is it not?

Alluding to the ark made by Noah, Peter, writing by Divine inspiration, says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer (request) of a good conscience toward God)

by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 3:21). There can be no question here as to whether *immersion* is symbolised, since the waters were above, beneath and all around the ark. "The end of all flesh is come before Me," said God. And that is exactly what baptism sets forth. In Noah's case, he passed through that which was death to all others, and he stepped out on a dried earth to begin a new life and a new witness.

It is interesting also to remember that Naaman "baptized" himself seven times in Jordan. He too, began a new life, so to speak, for "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child and he was clean." The fuller result was that he could say, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel," and again, "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD" (2 Kings 5:14-17). What a beautiful type of a baptized believer!

The Baptism in the Spirit is the work of the risen Lord Jesus, and took place first on the day of Pentecost. What is the language of Scripture? "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). True, it is said the Holy Spirit, as tongues of fire, sat upon each of them. But is it straining the language to assert that those sitting in the "filled" house were immersed? When the Spirit came upon the old-time saints, He is said to have "clothed" them. Is it straining the imagination to say that a like experience was that of those who first

experienced Baptism in the Spirit, as recorded in the Book of Acts, chapter 2? These thoughts are commended to the prayerful consideration of readers.

The Lord's Command

Our Lord baptized disciples, but the baptizers were His apostles. He did not perform the act Himself (John 3:2, 26; 4:1-2). And we are told He revisited the scene where He himself had been baptized (John 10:39-42). But prior to His ascension, His command was very plain to His apostles, and cannot possibly be misunderstood by one who takes Him simply at His word. In Matthew 28 He said, "Go ye therefore and make disciples (see margin) of all the nations, baptizing them (disciples, not nations) in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (28:19). The word "them" is masculine, and cannot refer to "nations," which word is neuter.

In Mark's Gospel, the command of the Lord, though couched in slightly different language, is not contradictory, but complementary. "And He said unto them, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

There is no ambiguity in these words. It is incumbent on all believers to be obedient, and though baptism in and of itself does not save, every act of loving obedience surely tends toward assur-

ance and enjoyment of a saint's acceptance in the Beloved. On the other hand, indifference may hinder joy and peace.

How did the Apostles obey?

They took their Lord's words in a literal sense. On the day of Pentecost, to hearers who were pricked in their hearts, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized." "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:38-41).

"But 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 . . . they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:12-16).

Thus Jews first, and then Samaritans, became baptized disciples, but a Gentile comes next in the record—an Ethiopian, to whom Philip, from Isaiah 53, "preached Jesus." He was baptized at his own request (Acts 8:36-39).

Paul is then before us. His remarkable conversion, attended by a sightless three days, was followed by baptism (Acts 9).

In the house of Cornelius, a Gentile army officer, the preaching of Peter was blessed by God, so that "the Holy Ghost fell on all *them that heard the Word*." There is no suggestion that babes were present or were baptized. Concerning these hearing ones, Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the Name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48).

Continuing in the inspired narrative, Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened," was baptized and her household (Acts 16:14-15). Are we to infer from this that infants were included? We do not know that Lydia was married, and the household in all probability, consisted of servants. The practice of baptizing infants cannot be proved from this passage.

The Philippian jailor's conversion is described as "believing in God." He "was baptized, he and all his." Why? Because he and *all his house believed in God*. Whatever their ages, "all his" were capable of exercising faith. They were therefore not infants.

When Paul preached in Corinth, "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Among these was the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16) of whom it is recorded that they "addicted themselves to the ministry of saints" (1. Cor. 16:15). Such could not have been infants, or other than those who were sufficiently mature both in age and spiritual attainment.

Notice the words used concerning the subjects of baptism. They are hearing, faith, repentance, pricking of heart, gladly receiving the word, great joy, gladness, rejoicing, an opened heart. If any one can produce herefrom an argument for infant baptism, then words have no meaning.

Is it not perfectly clear that only those who *believed* were baptized in those early days, quite apart from the question of age? Moreover, the mode was *immersion*, never sprinkling or pouring.

The Argument from Circumcision

This is commonly used by advocates of "household" and "infant" baptism; but is it valid? It is supposed that the converted Jew, having been used to the circumcision of every male member of the household at the early age of eight days old, would *naturally* expect his infant children to be baptized as well as he. But would he? Let it be remembered that only males were subject to this Mosaic rite. What of his female children? Surely here is a stumbling block.

But there *is* an analogy. The Jewish baby boy was circumcised *because of his birth* into Israel. All others were excluded. Baptism, if the analogy is logically followed up, should be restricted to *spiritual infants*, who *have been born again*, and therefore must be of an age when *faith* is possible. One feels that the argument is not only defective, but shows a wish not to give up a cherished opinion.

The Teaching of Baptism

It is in the epistles that the meaning of baptism is opened out. It is called a "burial," the word employed being that used for the interment of a

dead body. "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death." "Buried with Him in baptism" (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). The words "with Him," that is, with Christ, signify that the believer died with Christ when He endured the penalty due to his sins, on the cross. This is confirmed by the words of 2 Corinthians 5:14, "If One died for all, then all died," that is, judicially so in the sight of God. "Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). The saved one then, by faith, accepts this fact, and shows it forth symbolically by being baptized—buried in the deep waters. Hence, the Apostle goes on to say, "Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him . . . Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:8-11).

There is, therefore, not only an immersion, but an emerging from the waters of baptism. To remain thereunder would lead to physical death, which the sinner, though now saved by grace, actually deserved, but, because of the resurrection of Christ, the saved one also lives. The whole context of Romans 6 teaches that the "going down into," and the "coming up out of" the waters is a picture of the spiritual death and resurrection of saved ones, identified with their Saviour.

But baptism is a call to godliness of life and true obedience. The whole body with all its members

has become dead to the old sinful life, and is now for God only; the saved one "should walk in newness of life." "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6: 13, see verse 19).

Concluding Thoughts

Seeing then how deeply significant is the act of believers' baptism, who among God's saved people ought to refuse obedience to Him Who hath commanded this? For every one who has gladly received the word of the truth of the gospel and has been immersed into the Name of our Lord Jesus has declared by that symbolic act—"I deserve to die. My sins merited eternal separation from God. But I rest on the atoning death and substitutionary work of my Saviour, the Lord Jesus, so that I may say: 'I have been crucified with Christ.' These waters are the grave in which I have been buried. I would die to my former ways, and the members which I used in sinning against God, I would now yield to God, as I now rise from this grave to 'walk in newness of life.' So then I may also say, 'Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'."

Doubtless many have experienced the truth of all this, without having been immersed. But how

much happier such would be if the Lord's word had been implicitly obeyed!

Dear fellow-saved-one, if you have not been baptized, it is not too late, provided there is no positive physical infirmity to hinder. May the Lord incline each reader to hear Him, Who said, "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments." "See, here is water! What doth hinder me to be baptized?"

APPENDIX

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

The word "put on" means "to dress or clothe" oneself, and implies that Christ is to be *manifest* in the new life. In other words, an open and bold profession and confession of Christ is to mark the baptized believer.

It has been argued that the use of the word "put on" or "clothe" shews that immersion is not imperative. But apart from the plain meaning of "baptizo," surely clothing is to envelope the *whole body*. The unadorned savage cannot be regarded as dressed or covered by his string of beads or strips of cloth. So, it is respectfully submitted, the sprinkling of a few drops of water on a person, young or old, cannot be regarded as baptism in the Scriptural sense.