

BAPTISM

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BAPTISM

WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS

So much has been said and written on this subject, so various and conflicting have been the opinions expressed, so widely divergent are the meanings given by scholars to the word *baptism*, that one naturally hesitates to write on such a theme. But a verse in the only book that is authority in the matter says: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraidedeth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). No one need hesitate to search holy scripture in order to know God's mind on any question, for we know that "the entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:130). Let us then turn to the pages of that blessed volume which alone can thoroughly furnish "the man of God . . . unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). A similar word comes to encourage us from Psalm 19:7b: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

Simple though we are, we need not fear to turn to the great river of divine instruction itself and ask, What does scripture say about baptism? That it has much to say on the subject is evident; therefore, it cannot be to the glory of God to ignore it. Where he has spoken he would have us reverently listen and obey.

CONVERSION TO GOD

“The law [or doctrine] of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Those who do not know what it is to have turned to God, those who have not been born again (John 3:3), need not expect enlightenment about divine things. Scripture plainly declares of such that they have “the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:18). “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:11).

Have you ever been truly converted to God? If you have professed to believe, how was such belief brought about? On what are you now resting for salvation? Are you at this moment a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, or do you just believe what the gospels tell about him? Do you know the joy of forgiveness, of justification from all things? (See Acts 13:38-39.) Can you truthfully say, “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God?” (Romans 5:1-2). If this knowledge is foreign to you, if this is something your soul has not yet entered into, if these questions must all be answered in the negative, I entreat you to consider for a moment your solemn condition in the presence of God.

If unsaved, you are by nature a sinner (Romans 5:19), by practice a transgressor (Proverbs 13:15), by nature a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:3), by practice a son of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2), by nature an alien (Ephesians 2:12), by practice alienated (Colossians 1:21). You are lost by nature (Matthew 18:10-11) because you are a member of a lost race; you are lost by practice, because of having deliberately wandered away from God (Luke 19:10).

Your situation is terrible and your condition is awful and you are absolutely helpless to change the situation by yourself. Baptism will not assist you here; church membership will avail you nothing; partaking of the communion is but to eat and drink judgment to yourself (1 Corinthians 11:27-29); religious efforts are all in vain. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6), and it can never rise above its own level. Cultured, it is only cultured flesh; religionized, it is but religious flesh. No amount of care and cultivation can change it into "spirit." Just as flesh is born of the flesh, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." There must be a new birth. Without it there is no hope, no salvation, no heaven, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:50).

There is one who can meet your need, and that one is the eternal Son of God, of whom it is written: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not; But as many as received him, to them gave he power [the right or authority] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). Here is hope for you, and here alone. Godly parentage will not ensure salvation, for it is "not of blood." Good resolutions and well-meaning professions will avail nothing, for they are "of the will of the flesh." Ordinances will never save, but only mock, for they are "of the will of man." Only the holy one, who has been so grossly sinned against and rejected so long, can save and bring about the new birth, for this is "of God."

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The word of God, likened to water from its cleansing efficacy (Ephesians 5:26), is that by which new birth is brought about (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25). This word is applied

by the Spirit, and the believing sinner is born anew.

Many have thought the Lord here was referring to baptism. That such was by no means the case the following note, from the pen of an honored servant of Christ (C. E. Stuart, "Tracings from the Gospel of John"), will make plain to any one who carefully weighs the facts pointed out:

Is not the rite of Christian baptism intended in John 3:5 by the use of the word *water*? Let us clarify this point. First, Christian baptism was not instituted until after the Lord's resurrection, and signified burial with him unto death (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). Obviously that could have no meaning nor effect till the Lord had died. In John 3:5 the Lord was speaking of life through birth, and of a blessing then to be enjoyed, not of burial unto death. Second, before his death, the kingdom of God was preached, and men were pressing into it (Luke 16:16). Third, the apostles were made clean by the Lord before his death, through the word that he had spoken to them (John 15:3). This was before the institution of Christian baptism, of which the twelve and others had no need, and to which they never submitted. Of a vital work in the soul the Lord spoke to Nicodemus, not of a sacramental rite to which the person is now subjected. Of the soul, and of the body, have we teaching here.

The way the Lord Jesus himself spoke of "the water that I shall give him" (John 4:14) is proof that in neither chapters 3 nor 4 does he refer to an ordinance, but to "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And in all of John's writings "the water of life" is clearly the message of the gospel.

Have you believed God's word? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16-18). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" (John 9:35). If so, then to you, as a believer, the remaining pages are addressed.

JOHN'S BAPTISM UNTO REPENTANCE

Let us first consider John's baptism unto repentance. This is distinct from Christian baptism (Acts 19:1-7). By it Jews expressed their repentance and their need of forgiveness. Baptism could not speak to the people about Christ's death, though in God's mind that was what was set forth. Nothing but death was due the sinner, and the Lord Jesus was to die in the place of the guilty. His own baptism was the pledge of this. For Jews it was owning that the baptized one deserved nothing but death and judgment. It expressed self-judgment, and so it was called a "baptism unto repentance."

No one would question that the mode of administering it was the same as that of Christian baptism for, though we read of change in formula and object, we have no record of a change in mode. It is self-evident that the apostles, some of whom began baptizing shortly after becoming associated with the Lord, simply went on prac-

ting the same manner in baptizing that their former teacher accustomed them to, as some of them had been followers of John the baptist prior to their hearts being directed to "the Lamb of God" (John 1:25-30). They certainly learned no new manner of administering it from Christ. (See John 3:22,26; 4:1-2.)

An interesting point in connection with the disciples' practice was suggested to me. When mothers brought little children to Jesus, the disciples drove them away. Could they have so acted if they or John had ever practiced infant baptism? Jesus, on the other hand, received and blessed them, unbaptized, and the Christian parent can rest assured he does today. Christ declared that "of such is the kingdom of heaven." Baptism is not needed to put them in it. They are already of it. It is the simple, childlike one who is recognized as a true subject of the kingdom.

Of John we read that he came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:1-2). The result is recorded in verses 5 and 6: "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."

Mark similarly testified (1:4-5): "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."

If the significant little word *in*, found in both these passages is not conclusive as to the mode of his baptism being by immersion, if any can tolerate the amazing conception of John's taking the candidate into the water, then pouring or sprinkling water on his head as he stood in the river, a passage in John's gospel would seem to effectually

dispel such an illusion for those who have ears to hear. "And John also was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, because there was much water there; and they came and were baptized" (3:23). If "much water" was the cause for choosing a certain place for baptizing, surely then baptism could have been neither by sprinkling nor pouring.

The Lord himself assents to this mode of baptism (Acts 8:38-39; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12), for of him it is expressly stated that he "was baptized of John in Jordan" (Mark 1:9), and he "went up straightway out of the water" (Matthew 3:17). This would not be true if he did not enter the mystic stream that told of what he must yet endure for those under sentence of death, with eternal judgment beyond it.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Jesus' baptism was not to be an example for us. His word certainly should remind us of that obedience which becomes all who profess to know the Father, whom he has revealed. But this was a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3), although he was "the Holy One of God," as even demons confessed (Mark 1:24), and Gabriel also testified (Luke 1:35).

Is it any wonder that John should "forbid him" (Matthew 3:14), knowing him to be the Son of God (John 1:29-34)? He who, as a babe, had been circumcised on the eighth day according to the law, would now, in subjection to the word given forth by John, put himself in company with the repentant part of the nation. As the shepherd of the sheep, he entered the fold by the door of submission to the rites of the law and the divine testimony of the time. John, as the porter, opened the door and he entered in, but only to lead out his own sheep, whom he called by name. This could not be though, until as the

good shepherd (John 10) he laid down his life for the sheep.

John's ministry was distinctly separative. The moral condition of the people at his appearing in the wilderness is graphically portrayed in the book of Malachi. Notice there God's nine-fold controversy with them (Malachi 1:2,6,7,12; 2:13-16,17; 3:7,8,13-15). Yet we see a remnant distinguished from the mass in Malachi 3:16-18. Such a company we notice in the early chapters of Luke, which included Simeon, Anna, no doubt Mary herself, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and all who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Those baptized by John took outwardly this remnant place. By his own baptism the Lord identified himself with them, and likewise set his seal on the ministry of his forerunner. The repentant part of the nation owned by their baptism that they deserved to die as violators of the divine law. The Lord Jesus took his place with them in baptism as the pledge that he was ready to die for them. As another has beautifully illustrated it, they were like men who had given a note for a debt they could never pay. He in his baptism endorsed their note and offered himself to pay it all. Sinless, he did not need to repent, but he was to "fulfil all righteousness" by bearing the curse of the law for those who did. Thus it was his joy to take his place with those who sought, not to hide, but to confess their guilt. Of old his Spirit in the psalmist had declared: "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight" (Psalm 16:2-3). His baptism was but the reiteration of this. The "excellent of the earth" were, in his eyes, not the proud, self-righteous Pharisees, but the humbler followers. They were the common people and publicans, but they justified God and condemned

themselves, and waited expectantly for the coming kingdom.

The looked-for king, anointed as such by the descending Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17; John 1:32-34), associated himself with this separated company, though his baptism in the Jordan was but a shadow of a far more solemn immersion (Luke 12:50) which he had yet to undergo. He was to confess as his own the sins, not only of this remnant company, but of all who will be saved through his mighty sacrifice. His baptism is the pledge of this, intimating that the way to his glory is by the cross. Prophets of old had testified that Christ had to "suffer these things, and to enter into his glory" (Luke 24:26). Peter told us they spoke of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11).

It was not merely as an example for us that Jesus was baptized. His baptism was of a different nature from that which he instituted after his resurrection, and for a different purpose. One has well said: "He was baptized to identify himself with a rejected remnant. We, by baptism, are identified with a rejected Christ."

The testimony of John was only preparatory. In the new dispensation we find that persons baptized unto his baptism were re-immersed when the full truth of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was declared (Acts 19:1-5). We have no record, however, of the re-baptism of those who had submitted to John's ordinance prior to the cross. Their association with Christ had already identified them with him. The twelve and others, unbaptized themselves, began the work of the new dispensation by baptizing three thousand on the day of Pentecost.

THE BAPTISM OF WRATH ON THE CROSS

Christian baptism speaks of the baptism of wrath on the cross, which our Lord Jesus endured as our substitute.

The prophetic psalms tell of this. Consider the depth of such passages as the following:

“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me” (Psalm 42:7). In the preceding verse, touchingly and fittingly indeed, the holy sufferer exclaims, “Therefore I will remember thee from the land of Jordan!” This, truly, was the entering of the atypical ark into the floods of Jordan at the time of the harvest when it “overfloweth all his banks” (Joshua 3:14-16). On the cross, the sinner’s just desert was meted out to him when Christ “bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” Floods, not of water, rolled o’er his spotless soul in those three awful hours of darkness in which the face of God was hidden from the holy sufferer. God “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He could well say, “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me” (Psalm 69:2). Solemn it is to hear his cry: “Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me” (Psalm 69:14-15).

Here he has in view, not only the judgment of God righteously meted out to him as the sinner’s substitute, but also the cruel baptism of insult and hatred, which men whom he would have saved caused to roll over his devoted head. Another psalm has more particularly in view the curse of the broken law, so that he can exclaim: “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves” (88:6-7). How the “Selah” at the close appeals to the believer. Pause and consid-

er with how great a price you have been redeemed and from how great a death you have been saved.

The above quotations provide some idea of what Jesus meant when he said: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50). In a limited sense his disciples could share this baptism with him (Matthew 20:23). They too could go beneath that which came from man only (but not from God), as in the case of James (Acts 12:2) and of John (Revelation 1:9). They said, not knowing what was involved at the time, "We are able" (Matthew 20:22). Could anything but immersion figure such a scene as that which we have seen in the above scriptures? How unspeakably precious is the privilege to be thus baptized unto his death.

BAPTISM IN THE COMMISSIONS

After having passed through all the agony of the cross the risen Lord gave the commissions as narrated in the closing chapters of the synoptic gospels. Luke did not mention the baptism at all; he was occupied with the gospel. Baptism is not a part of that, as 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 1:17 indicate. The gospel concerns God's Son (Romans 1:1-4), not ordinances (however blessed) or works (however proper to the man already justified by faith and a subject of grace [Titus 2:11-14]).

Consider the commissions recorded in Matthew and Mark. In Matthew 28:18-20, we read: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple or make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in [unto] the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you

always, even unto the end of the world [completion of the age]. Amen." The commission is to make disciples, and these disciples are to be baptized and instructed. This command has never been annulled or repealed.

There is no warrant here for the concept of baptizing nations, unless preceded by national repentance. All nations are to be taught the gospel. If indeed the nations as a whole become disciples, then to baptize them is in place, but that is in a future day (Zechariah 14:16). At present this commission applies to individuals. In fact, the word merely means "gentiles"; that is, the gospel is to be world-wide in its scope.

Neither here nor yet in Mark 16 is the believer or disciple told to be baptized, for it was to his servants that the word was addressed by the Lord. Consequently the command is rather to the preacher to immerse the disciple. Would any lover of the Lord Jesus plead this an excuse for evading responsibility in the matter, shifting it on the shoulders of the servant and being careless himself as to whether the divine pattern had been carried out? Do not the words, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," show us the importance of the recipient of the gospel seeing for himself that God's word is carried out? Surely the heart that beats loyally to its absent Lord remembers his saying: "If a man love me he will keep my words" (John 14:23) and "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Is not Peter's message in Acts 2:38 imperative? "Repent, and be baptized every one of you." Here is a command given by the Holy Ghost. So, in Cornelius' house, "He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48). Baptism, therefore, if not directly commanded by the Lord in person, is by the Spirit in the apostle, and is surely one of Christ's "words" which he who loves our Lord will "keep." To teach that a later

revelation, given to Paul, has rendered all this null and void, is but to make the word of God of none effect by human tradition.

As to formula, it is "unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Being "baptism unto death," it is fitting that it should be unto the name of the trinity, for how unitedly do Father, Son, and Spirit participate in the offering of the Son of man on the cross. It was God, as Father, who withheld him not, but gave him out of love to the world (John 3:16), while the Son was the voluntary sufferer (John 10:17-18). Yet it was "through the eternal Spirit [that Christ] offered himself without spot to God" (Hebrews 9:14). The phrase "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5) does not set this aside. These scriptures simply keep before us in whose authority it was done, bringing out the contrast between the baptism of John and that of the Lord Jesus. It would not seem to be the formula that is in view at all. A full scriptural formula would be: "In the name of the Lord Jesus, I baptize thee unto the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

In Mark 16:15-16 baptism is directly connected with believing, and in such a way as to make it the public seal of faith (as in some sense "confession with the mouth" is in Romans 10:9-10). Here we read, "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." Significantly, we do not read, "He that is not baptized shall be damned." Justification before God is by faith, apart from works (Romans 4:4-5). But it is taken for granted that a true believer will be desirous of fully identifying himself with his Lord. Thus baptism is looked on as the very first act of faith, which alone gives it value, for apart from that it is a meaningless form. Some, who were not real believers at

all, might be immersed in all good faith on the part of the evangelist, as in the case of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-13,18-23), but nowhere in scripture do we read of any laborer knowingly baptizing one who was not saved, and never of the baptism of any too young to exercise faith in the Son of God.

BAPTISM UNTO THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid [or by no means]. How shall we, that are dead [or have died] to sin, live any longer therein? 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 up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:1-5).

The word *unto* is probably a more accurate word to use in the above passage in place of the word *into*. The Greek preposition can be translated either way. (See 1 Corinthians 10:2.) Israel was said to have been “baptized unto Moses.” It is the same word. They were separated to Moses as leader, and we are separated to Jesus Christ as Lord.

The doctrine of grace in the previous chapters shows that a man is “justified by faith without [or apart from] the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28). There is also the additional teaching of the change of headship, from Adam to Christ (Romans 5:12-21). These two facts might lead some to ask, “If all is of grace, why not indulge myself as I please? The greater my sin the greater the

grace that will bring me through.” In answer, the apostle Paul made an appeal to the foundation truth symbolized in baptism at the very beginning of the Christian course.

“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid,” he exclaims. We died to sin, died out from under its dominion, because Christ with whom we are now identified died to it. It must no longer control us. We are not to live in that to which we died. Was not our baptism a burial unto his death? Did it not say we had died with him and were now buried with him? “Know ye not that so many of us as were immersed unto Jesus Christ were immersed unto his death?” Here definite knowledge is connected with the ceremony. They should have been aware of this at the time. Paul was surprised at the ignorance of any among them who did not realize that his former condition was over forever.

In baptism I recognize that in myself I have no hope. Death is my just portion. But Christ has died, and he died for me. His death is my only ground of confidence. Therefore I am buried to it. His death is my death. I died with him. All that I was by nature God dealt with judicially in the cross of Christ. Having died, it is right that I should be buried. My old condition is at an end, and of this the watery grave is witness.

This does not mean that the unimmersed are not also buried with Christ, if they are believers. All such have died with him, been buried with him, and are raised with him. Baptism is only the outward acknowledgment of this, “the likeness.”

Faith says, “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). Baptism is the confession of burial with him. Henceforth, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” “Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

If sin would seek to control me, I am to point back to the grave and say, I was buried there. I died with Christ from under your authority. You cannot expect my service this side of the tomb. I am a resurrection man. Baptism has outwardly separated me from your sphere. In Colossians the same truth is enforced: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein [or in whom] also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (2:11-12).

Here it is clearly taken for granted that all who are rightly subjects of baptism have been raised with Christ "through the inwrought faith of God," as some would translate it. This is not true of all the baptized, but it is God's order, not man's confusion, that is in view. According to the divine pattern the baptized are a company of people who are actually circumcised with the circumcision made without hands; that is, the baptized have seen the end of the flesh (as before God) in the cross, and now stand on resurrection ground. Circumcision was a cutting off of the flesh and Christ was cut off for me. So the flesh is gone, from God's viewpoint. I died when Christ died, and so I have been circumcised in his death.

Some believe that baptism and circumcision are to be viewed as one ordinance succeeding the other. However, an Israelite was to be circumcised the eighth day, but in the present dispensation the one who, by new birth, is brought into God's family, is to be baptized. There is a similar thought in Peter's first letter. Commenting on the typical aspect of Noah's deliverance through water (saved by the waves of judgment which, while they overwhelmed the ungodly, carried him and his over to a new earth) he wrote: "The like figure [antitype] whereunto even bap-

tism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

Noah, saved through the flood of wrath in the ark, foreshadowed the believer's deliverance from judgment, as baptism clearly expresses. Christ endured the curse, even as the ark bore the brunt of the storm, and the believer can say, "His death was mine." It is not to baptism that any efficacy attaches; that could only put away outward filth. There is not the slightest justification here for the ritualistic dogma of baptismal regeneration. The only thing that gives the answer which a good conscience demands is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. That apprehended, baptism is full of meaning. "He who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

Connected closely with the scripture from Peter's epistle is the question of baptism for the remission of sins. In Acts 2 the main points of Peter's address on the day of Pentecost were these: God had promised to raise up one of the seed of David to sit on his throne (2:30), but before he was manifested in his glory he was to pass through death, and in resurrection Jehovah would give him a place as man on his throne, there to sit until his enemies were made a footstool for his feet (2:25-35).

The greater part of this had been already fulfilled. Jesus of Nazareth (2:22-24) had been slain by the Jews, but God had made him Lord and Christ in his resurrection (2:36).

Consider for a moment the result of such a message, if it were really believed. The messiah was promised; he

came; by wicked hands he had been crucified and slain; Jehovah had accepted him. His foes were to be made his footstool. What of Israel's hopes now? What should they do to escape the threatened judgment? All this and more would be involved in the anxious question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (2:37).

Notice, it was not the query of the Philippian jailor: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). The thought of personal salvation is perhaps included in it, but the question here was rather, What shall we do to escape the impending fate of Christ's foes, as part of the nation that had rejected him? In accordance with Psalm 2, the messiah had been set at nought by the rulers and the people, yet God's decree would stand. How then could they "kiss the Son" and avert his wrath? The nation had forfeited the favor of God, and with it the outpouring of the Spirit promised through Joel (Acts 2:17-21). What should they do to obtain it again?

The answer is simple. Let those who confess their guilt be baptized in the name of the rejected and crucified Lord. This would break the link that binds them to apostate people. They would then be out of the sphere on which governmental wrath must fall. Administratively their sins would be remitted. They would not share in the judgment so soon to come upon messiah-rejecting Judah (Luke 21:16-24).

Governmental or administrative forgiveness refers to earth, not to heaven. We speak of God's dealing in chastisement with people here as his "governmental ways." Such dealing would be averted by baptism, which was in itself the confession of sincere repentance. It was remission of this nature to which the Lord referred when he said, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:23). Peter exercised this power when he offered

remission of sins to all who submitted, on repentance, to baptism. In keeping with this it will be found that gentiles were never told to be baptized for the remission of their sins.

To Paul, a Jew, Ananias conveyed a similar message (Acts 22:16). The erstwhile "persecutor of the way" (Acts 22:4) had to be baptized, calling on the name of Jesus, and his sins would then be forgiven him. As part of the nation he had to share its fate. As baptized out of it and unto Christian ground, his sins would be governmentally washed away. However, this does not touch the question of how he was eternally saved. His own message to others was this: "Be it known unto you therefore men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things . . ." (Acts 13:38-39).

Peter carried a similar message to Cornelius, assuring him that "to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." This is eternal forgiveness before God. On receiving this forgiveness by faith, Cornelius and his company were subsequently baptized (Acts 10:43-48).

Baptism cannot be preached for the remission of sins, except in a general sense, after the dispersion of the nation and the demolition of the temple (Matthew 24:2). It is never mentioned in any of the epistles. It was God's message for the time, which soon passed away, leaving the mass of the people of Israel hardened and impenitent. A word that concerns this is found in Galatians 2:7, where Paul said, "The gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of circumcision was unto Peter." Of course, even among gentiles and throughout the dispensation one's sins could be said to be remitted by baptism, not before God but before the church (John

20:22-23); that is, the past sins are no longer held against the baptized person by the public body of believers. This cannot, however, be pressed too far.

BAPTISM OF HOUSEHOLDS

Baptism, we have seen, is unto Christ's death. Those who are to be baptized are "men and women" (Acts 8:12) who have professedly availed themselves of that wondrous provision for salvation. They are risen with Christ, and are capable of understanding what it means. Therefore, by no means should infants or persons incapable of understanding the truths of the gospel be baptized. Those baptized are to "walk in newness of life." Persons unable so to walk are never contemplated as having been baptized at all. From Colossians we also see they are persons who have been circumcised by the circumcision of Christ and are subjects of "the inwrought faith of God."

Peter, too, presumes that they had the demand of a good conscience. By faith they had apprehended Christ as risen for their acceptance. If, then, scripture speaks of households being baptized, and there is not a hint of one of the members being still of the "children of wrath," must we not take it for granted they were all professedly Christians?

Let us consider the first incident, a fitting precedent for all the rest, of household baptism in the house of Cornelius. Acts 10:44 clearly states that "while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word." In verse 47 the apostle asked, "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 10:48).

As to Lydia's household, in Acts 16, if the faith of only the head of the house is mentioned, why doubt that of the

other members when God's order has been already declared? To sanction the baptism of infants, or unconverted adult members of a household by appeal to this passage, one must first prove that Lydia was a married woman; second, that she was a mother; third, that her children did not believe; and fourth, that a new but unrecorded revelation had been given to Paul, commanding the baptism of all such when the head of a house acknowledged Christ in this solemn ordinance.

It is noteworthy in verse 40 we are told that Paul and Silas "went out of the prison and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren [not the babies] they comforted them and departed." It is surely just as reasonable to suppose that these unnamed brethren composed the household of the "seller of purple" as that she had small children with her at this time.

As for the case of the jailer, though some would alter the translation to make it convey the thought that all the household rejoiced, yet he alone believed. Many learned men agree that verse 34 gives a fair equivalent to the original text: "When he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." And verse 32 plainly says, "They spake unto them the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." All were capable of hearing the word, and all believed. No wonder he and all his were baptized straightway. How one would rejoice at witnessing many such baptisms of households.

Paul mentioned also having baptized the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:16), which he did not forget to record "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (16:15). Many have been troubled over the fact that there is a slight difference in the Greek words translated "household" in the first chapter and "house" in the last. The former word is said by some to refer exclusively

to the family, while the latter includes the servants, though not excluding the former. This does not affect the position taken here, for no babies are mentioned as having been in Stephanas's household, and we dare not add unto the word of God (Proverbs 30:6). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16, "I baptized none . . . of you save Crispus and Gaius . . . and I baptized also the household of Stephanas." These verses do not teach that the latter were infants when baptized, but simply that they were not locally connected at Corinth at all times. They were "the first-fruits of Achaia," the province in which Corinth was located. There is not the slightest hint that any other than the baptism of professed believers had been practiced in their case. In Acts 18:8 we are informed that "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." Doubtless the household of Stephanas would be numbered among these.

That the children of believers are already in a sphere of blessing and not introduced into it by baptism is clear from 1 Corinthians 7:14: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." That is, though the children of mingled Jewish and gentile parentage were unclean until circumcised (see Paul's action in regard to Timothy, Acts 16:1-3), the child of one Christian parent is clean and outwardly holy because of the parent's faith. To be born in a Christian family is to be born in a place of privilege, the limits of which are in no sense defined by baptism, nor is it the door into it.

Israel baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10) in no sense warrants the baptism of children, merely because they passed through the sea with

their parents. That was a national baptism, whereas Christian baptism is individual.

In Ephesians 1:4-6 three circles are mentioned, embracing the church, the sphere of profession, and creation. This passage does not warrant anyone putting people into the sphere of profession until they have something to profess. Simon Magus was the first person we know of who was baptized while unconverted; such a mistake is likely to occur, as the baptizer cannot read the heart. It is bad enough to baptize people ignorantly, but it must never be done knowingly.

As God would have it, the church should include the entire sphere of profession. It is man who builds in wood, hay, and stubble (1 Corinthians 3). The divine order is always that of Acts 18 above mentioned: hearing, believing, and being baptized. This passage would clearly prove that the apostle did not mean to slight baptism when, in 1 Corinthians 1:17, he said, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Though this was quite in keeping with his commission (Acts 26:16-18), yet he evidently took care to see that his converts were baptized, though he did not always do it himself. The twelve were not sent to baptize, any more than Paul, but to disciple the nations. This was of paramount importance. Baptism followed in an orderly way.

Paul gave his reasons in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 for being thankful that at Corinth he had baptized so few. But twice he appeals to these very Corinthians on the fact of their having been baptized as professed believers. In this chapter, when fellowship was in question and they were setting up other heads than Christ, he asked, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). The only name to which a believer should gather is the worthy name to which he was baptized.

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

The Corinthian saints had fallen into the Sadducean error (Acts 23:8) of denying the resurrection of the dead. In refutation of this Paul first reminded them that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was a fundamental truth of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Then he asked: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" adding, "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ; whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:12-17). All for the believer depends on the glorious fact that he "who bowed his head so low, underneath our load of woe" could not be holden of death. It was the resurrection that expressed God's perfect satisfaction in the work of his Son, and tells of sins forever gone. They were laid on him (Isaiah 53:6) when he hung on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). There are none on him now. The believer rests in this and has perfect peace.

How then could the Corinthians question the resurrection of the saints when they began with the resurrection of the savior? Furthermore he added that if there were no resurrection "then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Corinthians 15:18). How inconsistent they were, and most miserable if they had no hope beyond this life (15:19), yet they were taking the places by baptism of those who had "perished" before them—if there were no resurrection of the dead. The argument is continued in verse 29: "Else what shall they do who are

baptized for [some would translate over] the dead [plural, dead ones], if the dead [ones] rise not at all? why are they then baptized for [over] the dead [ones]?"

If those preceding them had only perished, why did they by baptism publicly put on Christ and thus expose themselves to shame and reproach in this life, with no brighter prospect for the future? How unreasonable an appeal this was if any of them had already been baptized as infants. In what sense could such be said to be baptized for the dead? This is a question of voluntarily taking the places of those who had fallen asleep.

By their very baptism they placed themselves in peril from the hatred of those about them to the gospel. What did they think to gain by it if they believed there was to be no resurrection? Why then put themselves in a place, by submitting to baptism, where their lives (which they should surely prize and desire to enjoy as long as they could) were likely soon to be forfeited, when they had no legitimate hope of blessing after death? They were only filling up the gaps already made by death; they were being baptized for those who had perished, and were likely soon to share their fate.

Surely in the state of things then prevalent nothing could be more telling. As for himself and those with him, Paul asked, "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" (1 Corinthians 15:30). If this life were all there was, it would be a foolish thing to put oneself in a position where he would gain the enmity of the world rather than its favor.

No superstitious practice of baptizing living persons for the benefit of dead ones is hinted at. It is just a military figure; they were filling up the ranks, taking the places vacated by those who had already "fallen asleep in Christ."

WHO HAS AUTHORITY TO BAPTIZE?

The question of authority is one that troubles many, and one that certain religious bodies make much of. Any brother possessing the ability to preach or teach is under responsibility to the head of the body (Colossians 1:18) to use the gift conferred on him by the Spirit (1 Peter 4:10-11; Romans 12:4-8). Any brother who ministers the word to the unsaved is responsible to see to the baptism of those who receive it (Matthew 28:19-20). Ordination to preach, or teach, or administer the ordinances is unknown in scripture. We do read of ordination to "serve tables" (Acts 6:1-6), and of the laying on of hands in the case of Barnabas and Saul (who had, however, been recognized teachers and preachers for some years previously) in Acts 13:1-3. There is also ordination of elders to act as overseers (bishops) where it was a question simply of local rule and not necessarily of public ministry (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-10; 1 Timothy 3:2-7). We read too of a gift in Timothy which was given him by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Timothy 4:14). But nowhere do we read of human ordination to prepare or authorize a man to teach, preach, evangelize, baptize, or administer the ordinance of the Lord's supper. Quite the contrary, we are told that in the case of gifts it is the Spirit who divides to "every man severally as he will" (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). This proves conclusively that even in Timothy's case the gift was not imparted by the presbytery, but to their expression of fellowship by "the laying on of hands" the Spirit of God added the gift mentioned.

As to administering ordinances, in the case of the Lord's supper, a presiding minister is unknown in scripture (1 Corinthians 11:20-29). We have the cases of Philip and Ananias as proof that no special ordination was required to baptize. The former baptized those who re-

ceived the gospel in Samaria as well as the Ethiopian treasurer of Queen Candace (Acts 8:5-13,36-39). The latter, who does not seem even to have been a preacher at all, was sent by God to baptize Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-18).

BAPTISM AND FELLOWSHIP

Scripture never intimates that like views of baptism are required to prepare saints for communion at the Lord's table. The rule is given in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." Membership in the body of Christ is the only church membership known in the New Testament. This is the basis of communion. All who have been saved through the precious blood of Christ, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and members of the one body, have a place at the Lord's table unless grave moral or doctrinal evil is practiced or held by them, or tolerated by association (1 Corinthians 5; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 John 10-11).

Every communicant should be baptized. The order of Acts 2:41-42 is clear enough as to that. But there is no scriptural warrant for insisting that only those who see and practice the immersion of professed believers are to be received at the Lord's table. This would be to make a new communion of baptism, and hence a narrower fellowship than that recognized in God's word. A brother who believes quite differently than I on baptism may have far more fervent love for the Lord Jesus than I. Together we can enjoy sweetest fellowship, while respecting each other's conscience as to a question that has

provoked much strife in the church. I do not need to hold any the less tenaciously to what I believe to be the truth, though, just because I refrain from judging him when he views the matter in a different light.

IS RE-BAPTISM SECTARIAN?

Many have asked me: "If one has been improperly baptized, that is sprinkled, or baptized in any mode, before professing faith in Christ, should he be re-baptized when he does confess him as savior? Is not the fact that it was done unto the name of the trinity sufficient? Are we to make more of the mode than of the name? Would not this be sectarianism?"

I know of absolutely nothing to justify a Christian's neglecting to be baptized after he believes. The fact that such a question can be asked only shows how far from scriptural order the church has drifted. Is man's failure, then, to hinder my obedience to the literal teaching of scripture? Whatever forms or ceremonies one might have gone through in his unconverted state, they were all lifeless and meaningless to him then. The argument of Romans 6 could never apply to one who had not been baptized unto Christ's death. This an infant could not properly be, for as yet it knows nothing of that death, and an unbeliever certainly could not know, for he is still living in his sins as though that death had never even taken place. Had he realized his need of the death of Christ and rested on it, he would be a child of God (Romans 5:8-10). Baptism for the unbeliever while he is in such a condition of soul is just a solemn mockery. It would simply be part of the "dead works" from which he repents, because of the flesh and not in any sense because of faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

In the case of what is called "christening," the sprinkling of an unknowing infant, where is there any act of obedience on its part, or on the part of those performing the ceremony? It is surely absolutely unscriptural and often demoralizing. In its worst phase, when coupled with the soul-destroying dogma of baptismal regeneration, it totally denies the doctrine of new birth by receiving the word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Apart from that doctrine, it is a meaningless rite.

Shall I, then, because men choose to link the name of the trinity with an ordinance of their own devising, fear to dishonor that name by re-baptism? And would I become sectarian in so doing? How could I become sectarian because I insist on literal obedience to the words of the Lord Jesus and his apostles, and because I ignore mere human inventions to which they have unauthoritatively linked that worthy name?

There is, in the questions mentioned above, an implication that often proves a snare to souls. It practically says, "You make too much of God's order, too little of his name. In honoring implicitly his prescribed mode, and literally keeping his words, you are in danger of dishonoring his name."

Is this tenable for a moment? Does it deserve any better name than sophistry? How can I better honor the name than by yielding obedience to the blessed one whose name it is? Will he connect his name with that which is contrary to his revealed word just because man does? How many other things are done professedly in and unto that name today that we know to be only dishonoring to it, and in no sense owned of God and without any warrant from his word?

As to the subject before us, God has clearly made known how he would have all ordered. He has given us, as already noted, his own pattern. It should be ours to

ignore all men's blunders and go on in simple obedience to it, just as though the mistakes had never been made. Let me rather err in a too literal subjection to his word, if that is possible, than go hand in hand with the traditionalists, who teach as doctrine the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9). Thus shall I be assured of his approbation in that day.

A PARTING INVITATION

Are you sure you are saved? If so, have you "kept" the word of the Lord Jesus, and obeyed the instruction of the Holy Ghost by being baptized since you professed faith in Christ? In Hebrews 8:5 the Spirit calls our attention to the Lord's care as to his house in the wilderness, "For, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." This left no room for man's thoughts in that day. God's pattern settled everything.

The house of curtains has long passed away, but God has a habitation (Ephesians 2:22) on earth now, even "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Is it to be thought for a moment that he is less particular as to its order than he was in regard to the shadow of old?

What, then, is the pattern now? Do we not find it in Acts 2:41-42? "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Have you received the word? If so, have you been baptized? If not, I pray you, ponder the words of the Lord Jesus: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).