

## BAPTISM

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Tonight, in the short time that we have with you I am going to present a very brief outline of what we believe about Baptism. We submit these beliefs to you as worthy of intelligent consideration. Baptism symbolizes the unity of man with God. It is a physical witness to the world of what the world forgets -- the Brotherhood of Man. Yet it is more than a physical act - it is a moral one as well. It is the response of the will to the appealing force of divinity, and it is essential for the spiritual growth and maturity of any man.

There are many texts frequently isolated and mis-used to prove baptism un-necessary. In Ephesians 2:8,9 we read: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast." In this passage Paul is saying that there is more required than the works of the law of Moses. This concept is borne out by Christ's conversation with the rich young man who had kept the law from his youth. Still this young man recognized that he lacked something. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And James advises us that we must be doers of the word as well as hearers.

Returning to Paul's statement, we would like for you to consider Grace as being 'divine forgiveness' as does Webster. Baptism makes possible the blessing of forgiveness. It is not like the pardon of a friend or neighbor, but it is the purifying love of God which cleanses the soul.

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A critic might say, "I doubt that So-and-So will ~~make~~ a very good Christian, but not God. He is not a super-policeman always waiting to catch someone in error when that person is trying to adjust his life to God's will. God is like a father who watches his child take its first steps, is anxious for its welfare, and is ready to stretch forth his hand to prevent a fall. With a knowledge of this condition and type of manifested mercy, one can and must make a clean break with the past which will enable him to build a new life. It is as Paul wrote (Weymouth 2 Cor. 5:17): "...if any one is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old state of things has passed away; a new state of things has come into existence." Christ stated very aptly: "No one, he said, "Tears a piece from a new garment to mend an old one, Otherwise he would not only spoil the new, but the patch from the new would not match the old. Nor does anyone pour new wine into old wine-skins. Otherwise the new wine would burst the skins, the wine itself would be spilt, and the skins be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wine-skins." (Weymouth Luke 5:36,38)

No, we do not question the importance of divine forgiveness, but we do question the means of receiving it. It is given only to those who are amenable to the principles of the gospel -- the third principle, according to Paul, is baptism.

Another text often used to disprove baptism is the 31 verse of the 16 chapter of Acts. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Let us analyze the circumstance of this statement. Paul and Silas were in prison, confined in stocks. They had been imprisoned because they ministered in the name of Jesus Christ. They were liberated during an earthquake that night. The jailer had heard them sing praises to God although they had been severely beaten earlier in the day. He felt that they were not ordinary men. It was only natural that he should turn to them when the jail was shaken. He asked them what he had to do and they told him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But that isn't all they said and it wasn't the end of the incident. We find in the 32 and 33 verses this account: "And they (Paul and Silas) spake unto him 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." In as much as one believes in Christ it is necessary for him to carry that belief to a logical conclusion -- the obedience to ALL the requirements of the gospel.

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In considering Baptism, we must determine the way by which it should be administered. We say this because through-out Christendom, among those who believe that some sort of baptism is necessary, there are three modes used in performing this sacrament: they are, sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. It is our custom to go to the Scriptures for the settlement of a question such as this. We find in Ephesians 4:5 that Paul has written: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." By this we know that there is just one acceptable baptism - not three. We further discover that John the Baptist said; "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance." There must be a water baptism then, but what kind? Although Christ was no sinner, he went to John to be baptized to set the example for men and to show his complete submission to his father. Jesus said it was necessary for him to be baptized in order "to fulfill all righteousness". Matthew 3:16 states: "And Jesus, when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water". Notice that he 'went up out' of the water. Here Christ recognized the one baptism, and it was and is immersion. At your leisure turn to the sixth chapter of Romans and read how Paul compares baptism to a burial. Ask your child to bury his toy in the sand-box and see if he pours or sprinkles sand upon it. He will do neither; he will cover it entirely with sand in order to bury it.

In recent historical novels several writers have made their characters conform to modern concepts by using other means than immersion for baptism. This is as much a fiction as the rest of the stories. There is no scriptural basis for this. During the first and second centuries immersion was the only proper mode, but in the third century sprinkling was introduced for convenience. Immersion was the accepted manner until the Council of Ravenna in 1311. This church believes that no man or group of men have the authority to cast aside the baptism of John, Christ, and the apostles, and substitute another in its place.

Contrary to many churches, we do not teach that there is a need for infant baptism. We believe that the atonement of Christ is sufficient for them in the event of their death before they reach to age of accountability. Christ took little children into his arms, laid his hands upon them and blessed them, but he didn't baptize them. There

is no specific record in the Bible that infants were ever baptized. You may ask, "If children were capable of receiving a blessing from Christ, why should they not be able to receive baptism?" Remember that baptism is for the remission of sins and Christ said of little children, "of such is the kingdom of heaven". Therefore there is no need for infant baptism. As a ministry, the priesthood of our church bless little children as did Jesus. If their parents teach them properly in c-operation with the ministry they may be baptized at eight years of age upon their own request.

The consciousness of moral error robs a man of total efficiency in whatever he does. There are wrongs that men cannot right if they are alone, but knit together by a common bond and motivated by the principles of Christ, there is no limit to the good they can do. Christ went about preaching the 'gospel of the kingdom'. He related many parables to explain various aspects of the kingdom. The kingdom to him was something that could be made a reality by people grouped together just as the 'saints' were following Pentecost when they had all things common.

We hold that the purpose of this church today is still the erecting or establishing of the kingdom of God upon the earth. This church offers an opportunity of participating in this divine task that no other organization offers. We agree with Thomas Carver who says that 'the religion worth having is the one that directs the combined efforts of men and institutions most effectively toward the kingdom of God. It is in the expression of group endeavors that individuals can do something about past errors. Personal salvation can only be achieved by working in mutuality with others for the welfare of all men. You cannot be saved because of one decisive act, but "religion must mean at least the response of your inner life to God, and all that which is involved in this term; and the socializing of that life so that the whole is benefited by it."

In light of what we have just said it is evident that the church must limit itself. It must show who is of the church and who isn't - who is devoted to the truths of Christ, and who is yet to be won to his ways. Baptism makes possible this distinction. We can agree that there are those who are baptized who do not yield completely to the purposes of God. It is also true that some who are sympathetic to the church are not members. But as F. Henry Edwards writes; "...the effective proponents of the kingdom of God are to be found among those who have made covenant with him, and whose decision has been registered in their own lives and in the life of the church by specific acts of dedication." (Fundamentals)

These things, then, we believe: that the ordinance of Baptism must follow repentance and faith. Its purpose is the remission of sins. The form is by immersion. It may be performed by any member of the priesthood except a teacher or deacon. Following baptism the candidate must be confirmed by the laying on of hands by the elders for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The objective of this church is to actualize the "Zion" of the prophets, and kingdom of the New Testament by developing a community in the life of which there shall be allegiance to Christ and obedience to his principles and laws.