

Baptism— The Door to the Kingdom

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.—John 3:1-5.

ABOUT NO OTHER ordinance or doctrine of the Christian church is there so much disagreement, so much argument, or so much scoffing indifference as there is about the ordinance of baptism. Not many years ago, for example, I read a witheringly scornful article from the pen of an army chaplain, directed toward a brother chaplain who had preached a sermon on baptism by immersion to the boys about to move up to the front line trenches. His attitude was that there are more vital and important things than baptism to be talked about when men are facing death.

Perhaps so. But all Christians are agreed on one thing—that man is powerless to save himself, and that salvation is to be had only in and through the atonement of Jesus Christ, our

Lord and Savior. Man cannot save himself. He is helpless, completely dependent on Christ for his salvation. Therefore, he is in no position to dictate the *terms* on which he will be saved. Christ, the only person who can save him, dictates the terms. To try to change them to suit the individual fancy, or simply to ignore them scornfully and still expect a full salvation is rebellion. It is an expression of the very attitude which sinful man must repent of and discard if he expects the atonement of Christ to be effective for him. One of the things would be that one had complied fully, freely, and humbly with every requirement which Jesus laid down for the salvation of his immortal soul. One should not want to be classed with those aloof and rebellious Pharisees of old, who scoffed at the publicans who were baptized of John, and refused to repent or receive baptism themselves. Luke 7:29, 30 describes them thus: "And all the people who heard him, and the publicans, 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."

TEACHINGS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Where shall we go to find what we must do to be saved? Again Christian people are agreed that the Scriptures speak with authority to instruct us in the ways and methods of salvation. What do the Scriptures say about baptism if we go to them open-mindedly? Let us see what Jesus says, and "hear him."

First, it is very clear that Jesus taught us the principle of baptism by his own example. Matthew tells how Jesus came from Galilee to John, to be baptized of him; how John at first demurred, recognizing his inferiority to the Christ; and how Jesus answered: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus, though he partook of the nature of Deity, partook also of the nature of man; and as a man he submitted to the ordinance

prescribed for all men who seek remission and forgiveness of their sins and entrance to God's kingdom. He gave us his example to follow.

Second, Jesus himself practiced baptism. The Bible contains a discrepancy on this point. John 3:22 reads: "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there *he* tarried with them, and baptized." Note that language carefully; Jesus and his disciples *came*; *he* tarried, and *he* (Jesus) baptized. Verse twenty-seven of the same chapter contains the words of some of John's disciples who came to him and said, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness [and obviously it was Jesus to whom John bore witness], behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." In other words, the disciples reported to John that Jesus was baptizing, trying by this report to arouse John's jealousy. But John refused to be aroused, reminding them that he himself had said that one greater than he should come.

Now let us look at the fourth chapter of John which opens with these words: "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made *and baptized* more disciples than John, (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)." These two verses contradict each other and the two verses we have already mentioned from the preceding chapter. Jesus came, and tarried, and baptized. The Pharisees heard that Jesus made *and baptized* more disciples than John, but Jesus didn't baptize any. If we simply leave out the comma (which has been supplied by modern translators and not by the original author), the verse reads: "Jesus himself baptized not but his disciples." In the light of three verses which state plainly that Jesus himself *did* baptize, this could mean only one thing: that Jesus baptized not any but those who were his disciples. Of course he would not baptize those who did not believe on him. He baptized his *disciples*.

WHO MAY BAPTIZE?

Baptism, though it may be performed by those who hold the priesthood of Melchisedec, which Jesus held, is primarily a function of the Aaronic priesthood which John held. That is why Paul says in a parallel passage in I Corinthians 1:17, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." His primary assignment was to preach, but he did baptize, for in preceding verses he names the household of Stephanas and also Crispus and Gaius as having received baptism at his hands. Jesus largely left the administering of ordinances to those he had chosen to assist him in his ministry, but on occasion he himself, like Paul, did baptize.

JESUS TAUGHT BAPTISM

He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). I know of no way that a man can be "born of water" unless he comes forth completely and bodily from the water; and the only way he can come out from the water is first to go completely into it. This is baptism by immersion. Except a man be born of water, he cannot enter the kingdom.

Jesus commanded the apostles to teach and practice baptism. Matthew 28:19, 20 records his language:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in 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."

In obedience to Jesus' command, the early apostles and other disciples taught and practiced baptism. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the people of Jerusalem and commanded 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 2:38). The tenth chapter of Acts tells the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his kinsmen and friends, the first Gentiles to be admitted to the New Testament church. And the closing verse of the chapter tells of Peter's command to them: "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48). Acts 16:15 tells of the baptism of Lydia and her household; and verse 33 records the baptism of the Philippian jailer by Paul and Silas. Acts 19:5 tells of Paul's baptizing certain converts who had been baptized previously by one without authority. The words of Ananias to Paul after his conversion were: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Acts 9:18 records that Paul obeyed this command and arose and was baptized. Yes, the early church taught and practiced baptism as the initiatory rite which gave entrance to the church and the kingdom.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

First, it is an act of physical obedience to a spiritual law, an outward sign of an inward grace. By *water* we keep the commandment, that we might be justified by the *Spirit*. Second, it is the making of a covenant, in which the one receiving baptism takes upon him the name of Christ, repents of his sins, and promises to serve and obey Christ faithfully and diligently until the end. Baptism is enlistment and commitment; it signals and gives public notice of a change of allegiance. Those who drift along without any such definite act of commitment are apt to be hazy and careless and indifferent about their allegiance to God and Christ. Baptism is a definite act of commitment; it distinguishes those who are definitely enlisted in Christ's church and kingdom from those who are outside looking in. It separates the believers from the "make-believers."

It is a necessary delineation of what is and what is not the church, of who are and who are not followers of Christ.

Baptism is a symbol. Men are so constituted that they need to use symbols to visualize and make concrete the intangible ideas and feelings and emotions which need expression in some tangible and visible form. The lover brings a bouquet of flowers to the lady of his choice, to express the love which he finds difficult to put into words. The wedding ring is a symbol of marriage; the flag is a symbol of a country; the cross is a symbol of our salvation; the scepter is a symbol of the king's power; the crown is a symbol of his royalty; the robes of a supreme court justice are a symbol of his dignity; the scale or balance is a symbol of justice. Baptism is such a symbol. It is an initiatory rite. It dramatizes and exemplifies the death of the old man, his burial, and his resurrection and new birth. It dramatizes and exemplifies the *cleansing* of the whole man, not just a part of him, and the remission of his sins. It symbolizes his obedience and humility as he surrenders himself into the hands of Christ's minister.

We believe that baptism by immersion is necessary to carry out the symbolism which is expressed in Romans 6:4, where Paul says: "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." It is indicated by Jesus' statement that we must be *born of water* and of the Spirit or we cannot enter the kingdom of God. Baptism by immersion is indicated in the statement that John baptized where there was "much water." Obviously a small amount of water in a bottle or jug would have been sufficient to sprinkle or pour on a considerable number of people. Baptism by immersion is indicated by the fact that Jesus "went up straightway out of the water," according to Matthew 3:16; also by the fact that Philip and the eunuch "went down both into the water" and after the baptism "they were come up out of the water," according to Acts 8:38, 39.

The Second Birth

The translators who put the Bible into English have wisely not tried to translate the Greek word *baptizo*, because there is no one English word which can convey all of its exact and implied meaning. *Baptizo* is the intensive form of the Greek verb *bapto*, and means to plunge vigorously beneath the water, to dip, to drench, to immerse. Robinson's *History of Baptism*, a book published in 1790, makes the interesting assertion that *baptize* is a dyer's word, meaning to plunge or dip beneath the water for the purpose of coloring or dying. That is, baptism imparts a moral or spiritual hue or color, by which the followers of Jesus can be recognized. In early Latin writings, John the Baptist is sometimes called "John the Tinctor," or one who dipped the people in water to tint them—change their moral and spiritual color.

Baptism is for those who are mature enough to repent of past sins and make a choice and a covenant to serve God in the future. Baptism when rightly administered by one having authority, and received in humility and sincerity, brings forgiveness of sins, and prepares the one receiving it for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Peter said to the people of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, "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 2:38).

Baptism is an initiatory rite of beautiful symbolism. It was instituted and commanded by Jesus as the door, or means of entrance, to his church and kingdom. Jesus has laid down the terms of salvation. God does not force any man to accept them; we all have our agency. We may accept Christ's terms and his methods of salvation, or we may reject them and arrange terms to suit ourselves. But remember, since we cannot save ourselves we must depend upon Jesus to save us; and if he is our Savior, he is the one who has the right to dictate the terms. He has said that we must be born of water and of the Spirit; he has set us the example. Let us follow him.

I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold, I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me, Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men, and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God. . . . My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was wrecked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.—Mosiah 11:186-188, 191-193.

IT takes a new creature to live a new life. If there ever was a time in the world's history when men have everything they need to shape a new life, it is today. We have multiplied knowledge until the brilliant scholars and scientists of a century ago would feel completely baffled in today's university classes and laboratories. We have multiplied inventions; we have flown our airplanes faster than sound; we have annihilated space; conquered the air and the sea; filled the ether waves with entertainment and pictures and music; banished the fear of old age and unemployment; boasted production to an all-time high; and gone a long way toward conquering sickness and disease and death.

Yet we are an unhappy, frustrated generation, living in momentary fear of war, uncertain of ourselves, drowning our sorrows and fears in unparalleled quantities of liquor,