

BAPTISM & THE LORD'S SUPPER ... BAPTISM

At the Protestant Reformation many fundamental doctrines were re-examined, among them the sacraments. At the start of our study we need to briefly examine this word 'sacrament'. As Baptists, the word with which we are more comfortable is the word 'ordinance'.

Indeed, the term 'sacrament' has the potential to convey the thought that some sort of grace is transferred; 'ordinance', on the other hand, is a term that simply stresses obedience to do that which Christ explicitly commanded.

This is the reason we would steer away from using such a word as 'sacrament'. It is used by the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and the Anglican churches to mean that without the reception of certain sacraments the believer cannot attain salvation, e.g. outside of baptism a person cannot be saved. The Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches recognise seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, marriage, penance, ordination, the eucharist and extreme unction ('last rites'). Indeed, Canon Law is uncompromising on this matter; the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1545-47, 1551-52, 1562-63), made it very clear, "If anyone saith that the sacraments of the New law were not instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or that they are more, or less, than seven, to wit, baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders and matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament, let him be anathema [*i.e. accursed*]."

In some sections of the early anabaptist (i.e. 're-baptizers') groups there were three ordinances, - baptism, Lord's Supper and *feetwashing*. Indeed, some Baptists today continue to practise feetwashing, e.g. Primitive Baptists and Free Will Baptists in the US. However, feetwashing generally came to be understood as something that belonged to the early church and has no significance for today ... except, perhaps, as a demonstration of true humility.

The subject of baptism is one that can be very emotive, - some of our paedobaptist friends are vehemently against any teaching of baptism that does not correspond with their's. Let's have a look first of all at ...

THE ERROR OF PAEDOBAPTISM

* First and foremost, paedobaptism (the baptism of infants) is nowhere prescribed or taught or found in Scripture! However, all types of theological somersaults are used to justify its practice.

* This is such a massive subject it is absolutely impossible to address it with any degree of completeness, but if you are interested, I have carried out a 20,500 word study entitled, “The Paedobaptist-Immersionist Debate as considered from the Historical and the Biblical Perspectives”. It explores the perspective from the historical theology, including the writings of Church fathers (e.g. Augustine, Cyprian, Thomas Aquinas) and documents from historical creeds and councils.

* I’ll mention just a couple of ‘arguments’ *very lightly* that paedobaptists use to bolster their point of view.

* In the Old Testament circumcision was the ‘mark’ the child belonged to the chosen race of Israel. It was instituted in Gen. 17:9-14.

* In the New Testament, - the paedobaptists allege in the body of doctrine known as ‘Covenant Theology’, - circumcision gave way to the baptism of infants (whilst this is an over-simplification, it basically and crudely summarises their view).

* They use such unfounded claims that texts such as [Acts 16:31 Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house](#) actually teaches there could have been infants amongst the household. (Also cf. Acts 16:14,15; 18:8; I Cor. 1:16; the household of Lydia, Crispus and Stephanus.) It is, however, an argument from silence for *nowhere* does the text support their supposition.

* They would similarly try to maintain their case by quoting [Col. 2:11 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: 12 Buried with him in baptism. ...](#) But Paul was writing to believers ... who had trusted in Christ with a personal conscious faith ... such believers had given their consent to be baptized, i.e. it did not include infants. No infant is capable of making this act of faith.

* Nowhere in the Scriptures does it remotely indicate any consideration of swapping Old Testament circumcision with New Testament baptism!

* Also ... a very basic consideration ... In the Old Testament only boys were circumcised on their eighth day, - not girls, ... so, if Old Testament circumcision is tantamount to New Testament infant baptism ... surely only boys should be baptised!

* A real danger with paedobaptism is also that, - in many quarters, - it is understood when a child is baptized it makes him/her fit for Heaven ... it makes them a Christian, - their *baptism* becomes the means of their salvation, not personal faith in Christ (how can an infant consciously believe in Christ anyway?!)

* In the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, ... Question 94 What is baptism? A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

* Now, I must emphasise that truly born-again paedobaptist Ministers often only baptise the children of believing parents ... however, it doesn't take away from the error of the practice. In his writing, *Vanity of Infant Baptism* (Part 2, pg3) Martin Luther wrote, "It cannot be proved by the Sacred Scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the apostles".

* In Anglicanism, the *Book of Common Prayer* claims, "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church" (p.299), i.e. baptism alone saves. In Article XXVII of the *Thirty Nine Articles*, "Baptism is ... a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed." "Baptism is the Sacrament through which a person, adult or child, is adopted by God as his child. The person, baptised with water 'In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit', receives all the privileges and responsibilities of a child of God and a brother or sister of Jesus, and becomes a member of the Church. It is the beginning of the journey of eternal life."

* This originates in the same stable as the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Roman Catechism, - known as the *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, - it states, "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration by water in the word (*per aquam in verbo*)". The *Catholic Encyclopedia* continues, "Baptism is, therefore, the sacrament by which we are born again of water and the Holy Ghost, that is, by which we receive in a new and spiritual life, the dignity of adoption as sons of God and heirs of God's kingdom".

* ... Rev. John Quincy was America's sixth President (1825-29); he was a soundly converted man, he wrote in *Baptists Thorough Reformers*, "Infant baptism is not that harmless, innocent thing which many suppose

it to be; but the parent of gigantic evils; the fruitful source of the existence of state churches, and most of the corruptions flowing therefrom; the instigator of all the persecutions which have ever been waged in the name of Christianity; a lying refuge and hiding-place of falsehood to ensnare and ruin souls; in short, the originator and propagator of Popery. Infant baptism is an error from beginning to end – corrupt in theory and corrupting in practice; born in superstition, cradled in fear, nursed in ignorance, supported by fraud, and spread by force.”

* So, I hope it is plain to see that paedobaptism has absolutely no foundation in Scripture and has its origins in pre-Reformation false church doctrine, i.e. Romanism.

THE TRUTH OF BELIEVER’S BAPTISM

* From the introduction of the New Testament Church there has only been one form of *Biblical* baptism. This Biblical baptism is a public profession of saving faith.

* This doctrine teaches that only those who have faith in Christ are members of God’s covenant Church/Family/Body, and baptism simply symbolises they have been washed and cleansed from their sin by the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

* Our *Baptist Confession of Faith*, ch. 29, para 2, “The only persons who can rightly submit themselves to this ordinance are those who actually profess repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, being willing to yield obedience to Him”.

* Baptism is merely a symbol and does not convey grace of any kind.

* Throughout the New Testament those who were saved were baptised. Salvation itself does not save, but it is testimony to our salvation.

* Furthermore, baptism is not an optional extra; it is a clear command of Jesus Christ Himself, [Mt. 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.](#)

* It followed on from conversion and led to church membership.

* It is an outward profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and it is an act of both confession and profession. It also looks forward to the believer’s resurrection of the body from the grave.

* As the candidate for the baptism goes down into the water this symbolizes dying to one’s self, and the water becomes as a grave. As the candidate goes under the water a ‘burial’ takes place. As the candidate comes up out of the water he is being ‘raised’ with Christ. By its symbolic nature the act of baptism proclaims the Gospel of Saving Grace.

* There is no doubt the emphasis of the New Testament word baptizo (**baptizw**) is to dip, immerse, wash, plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm. Total immersion is the clear Scriptural understanding of this word.

* There are some who contest that it does not mean full immersion, they reckon it means ‘pouring’ (affusion) or ‘sprinkling’ (aspersion). They get their reasoning from an ancient writing known as the *Didache* (c.70-160 AD), “7:3 But if thou hast not living water, then baptize in other water; 7:4 and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm. 7:5 But if thou hast neither, then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Conclusion

* Does it really matter which way we are baptised? Should someone who has been ‘baptised’ as an infant be ‘re-baptised’ as a believer?

* The answer is simple: yes, they should ... because it is only as a believer that baptism is truly Biblical and acceptable to God.

* There is no age limit ... as long as the elderly person is fit to get down into the water and the young person is fully aware they are professing a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ... there is no age limit.

* Baptism does not save, but it is the public means whereby I have professed I am saved and I belong to the Redeemed Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

* It is one of the most beautiful and meaningful practices of the Church, - ... when we look back on our baptism with grateful thanks to God and meaningful reverence for His Name.