

BAPTISM — TRUE AND FALSE

By J. Foster Crane

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BAPTISM — TRUE AND FALSE

Every day many people, infants and adults, by sprinkling or immersion, submit to the Christian ordinance known as "baptism." If asked, however, just how this rite affects their relationship with God, or in what way they have benefitted by it, the majority have not the faintest idea. They "hope" it somehow increases their chances of going to heaven some day, but just how this works they are not sure.

The object of this booklet is two-fold:

- (a) To impress upon the true Christian the place and importance of baptism, and
- (b) To warn the unwary against its misuse.

1. THE MEANING OF THE WORD ITSELF.

"Baptism" is not a true English word, but comes from the Greek "baptisma" which in almost every instance of its use in the Greek New Testament and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), means, both as a noun and as a verb, "to immerse," "to plunge into," "to overwhelm," "to cover."

A. IT IS USED TO DESCRIBE THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST (Mark 10:38)

The Lord was literally "immersed" and "overwhelmed" in the intensity of His sufferings and agony. This is graphically illustrated in the experience of Jonah who (as a type of Christ, Matt. 12:40) cried from beneath the waters, "Thou hadst cast me into the deep, into the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me . . . the waters compassed me about; even to the soul; the depth closed me round about" (Jonah 2:3-5).

B. IT ALSO DESCRIBES THE EXPERIENCE OF BELIEVERS WHO ARE "BAPTISED" INTO THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST (Acts 1:5, 11:16).

C. IT GENERALLY REFERS TO IMMERSION IN WATER OR SOME OTHER LIQUID.

- (a) When the blood was sprinkled on the door posts at the

Passover the hyssop was "dipped" (bapto) in the blood (Exodus 12:22).

- (b) When the sin offering was slain the priest "dipped" (bapto) his finger in the blood and "sprinkled" (ranei) it before the Lord. Here dipping and sprinkling are seen as two different acts (Lev. 4:6, 14:16).
- (c) When the leper was cleansed the bird was "dipped" (bapto) in blood and water (Lev. 14:51).
- (d) When Naaman was cleansed he "dipped" himself (ebap-tiste) seven times in the river Jordan, i.e. he immersed himself (2 Kings 5:10-14).
- (e) In New Testament times the priests "washed" (baptismos) their vessels and utensils, a process generally carried out by immersing them in water (Mark 7:4).
- (f) John the Baptist baptised by immersion, hence his use of the river Jordan. When the Lord was baptised we read that tHe "went up straight-way out of the water" (Matt. 3:16). John did not baptise "with" but "in" water. In John 3:23 we read that "John was baptising in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there" — the people went to John to be baptised, he did not go to them.
- (g) At the Passover supper the Lord "dipped" (bapto) the sop before giving it to Judas Iscariot (John 13:26).
- (h) When the Ethopian was baptised by Philip in a desert spring we read that they both "went down into the water" and "they came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39).

D. THE TESTIMONY OF OTHERS.

"The Greek word used in the New Testament, 'baptizo,' means 'to plunge' or 'to dip.' There is no question whatever that the main method of baptising in New Testament times was probably immersion" (N. Lade in 'The Methodist Point of View').

"For the first three centuries the almost universal practice of baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament, i.e. immersion, and which is the very meaning of the word 'bap-tise'" (Dean Stanley).

"As to the 'plunge' and 'emergence' we would only say without entering further on an agitated question that it seems to us clear that baptism was at first, theoretically, an entire immersion" (Bishop H. G. Moule).

2. "BAPTISMS" IN PRE-CHRISTIAN TIMES.

- (a) Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:20 that the flood in Noah's day when "eight souls were saved by water" was a foreshadowing of New Testament baptism.
- (b) When the Hebrews left the land of Egypt we read that they were "baptised unto Moses" in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:1-2).
- (c) Under the law the Jews practised many cleansing and purification rites which are referred to in Hebrews 6:2 as "the doctrine of baptisms." Priests were consecrated; lepers and defiled persons were cleansed in ceremonial washings in water (Lev. 8:6, 14:8-9, 17:15-16; Hebrews 9:9-10).
- (d) Finally John the Baptist called upon the people to confess their sins and demanded that they be baptised in Jordan as a sign of their repentance.

There is, however, no power or efficacy in water to forgive sins and cleanse the conscience — all washings and cleansing in Old Testament times were types foreshadowing the once-for-all cleansing that was to be brought about by the coming Redeemer, Christ, through His atoning blood and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel foretold this clearly when he said, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean . . . a new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you" (Ezek. 36:25-27; see also Jeremiah 31:33). Jesus may have been referring to this "clean" water when He told Nicodemus that he needed to be "born of water and the Spirit" in order to enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5).

John the Baptist quite clearly stated that his baptism in water merely anticipated the once-for-all work of cleansing and regeneration that Christ would accomplish in the Spirit (Matt. 3:11). Jesus Himself confirmed this when He said, "John baptised in water but ye shall be baptised in (not 'with') the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5).

3. BAPTISM IN THE CHURCH AGE.

A. THE NECESSITY FOR FAITH IN SALVATION.

All Old Testament types, promises and prophecies relating to cleansing, forgiveness and acceptance before God find their fulfilment in the gracious work of Christ accomplished on Cal-

vary and in His resurrection from the dead. Reconciliation with God and the enjoyment of His favour and fellowship is now wholly a matter of GRACE and must be received in FAITH ALONE, without reliance on any Old Testament ceremonies or works of the law. Any attempt to explain New Testament baptism will fail unless this is clearly grasped.

Here are some of the blessings that God offers freely in this age of grace to all who accept them in repentance and faith.

- (a) THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).
- (b) SALVATION. "By grace are you saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).
- (c) JUSTIFICATION. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).
- (d) ETERNAL LIFE. "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47).
- (e) SONSHIP. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).
- (f) ACCESS TO GOD'S PRESENCE. "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Romans 5:2). "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22).
- (g) UNION WITH CHRIST. "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17). "The life which I live I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).
- (h) THE HOLY SPIRIT. "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14).

B. THE ACTIVITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION.

All of these blessings mentioned above, and more, are God's free gifts to all who trust in CHRIST ALONE, but they, in turn, are communicated to the believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit whom the Father sent to earth upon the Son's return to heaven (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; Acts 1:4). This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) and will never be repeated. As John baptised the Jews in water so Christ baptises believers in the person of the Holy Spirit. Upon acceptance of Christ each believer is immediately "sealed" and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13,

4:30) FOR ALL TIME (John 14:16; Romans 8:9). Note how the Holy Spirit applies the blessings of the gospel to the heart—

- (a) HE GIVES ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS. "The Holy Spirit is a witness to us for he said before . . . their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:15-18).
- (b) HE IMPARTS THE LIFE OF CHRIST TO THE SOUL. "The Spirit of truth shall be in you; I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you" (John 14:17-18).
- (c) HE REGENERATES. "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).
- (d) HE GIVES ACCESS TO THE FATHER. "Through Him (Christ) we have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18).
- (e) HE MAKES US SONS OF GOD. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4:6). "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God" (Romans 8:16).
- (f) HE UNITES ALL BELIEVERS INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST. "In one Spirit we are all baptised into one body" (1 Cor. 12-13).

All of these blessings, I repeat, are the direct result of what is called "the baptism in the Spirit" as foretold by John and fulfilled by Christ. To wait or tarry for the baptism in the Spirit now, or to expect a "second blessing," is an act of sheer unbelief; it casts doubt on the faithfulness of God, implies that Christ's death on the cross is not sufficient to save, and suggests that He has not risen, neither returned to the Father; it also leaves the soul open to all forms of Satanic delusion and deception.

This section leads naturally to the next aspect—

C. THE RELATION OF WATER BAPTISM TO FAITH AND THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN SALVATION.

If one is saved by faith in Christ, why be baptised in water? Why revert to an immersion in water when one is already immersed in the Holy Spirit? Is this not a step back to the Old Testament shadows?

There are three ways in which present-day churches attempt to answer these questions—

1. Some as, for example, the Salvation Army and Quakers, state that **WATER BAPTISM IS NO LONGER NECESSARY**; all references to Christian baptism, they say, mean only Spirit-baptism; the water referred to in Acts 8:36 and 10:47 refers to the water of everlasting life (John 4:10, 7:38).

2. Most of the major denominations view water baptism **AS A MEANS BY WHICH THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL ARE RECEIVED**. More about this later.

3. The third alternative is to view water baptism as **AN OUTWARD HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN**.

Water baptism in itself is not a guarantee or a God-given “sign” or “seal” that one is thereby saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Simon was baptised but his heart was not right with God (Acts 8:13, 21); the dying thief went to paradise but he was certainly not baptised (Luke 23:43).

On the other hand it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate baptism from faith; faith leads naturally to baptism and baptism is the obvious outcome of and response to faith. “There is one Lord, **one faith, one baptism**” (Eph. 4:5) — the once-for-all baptism in the Spirit is expressed in the once-for-all baptism in water; one baptism viewed from two viewpoints — Godward and manward.

A repentant Jew who refused to be baptised by John, or a professing Christian who refused to be baptised as a believer, would have been viewed in New Testament times as a hypocrite and a sham.

The saved, redeemed Christian who has been immersed into the Holy Spirit does not need an immersion in water to add to or complete his salvation in Christ; yet, having been saved, he will see in this simple rite much that illustrates and reflects that inner work of the Holy Spirit which he has already accepted in faith.

(a) **BAPTISM IN WATER IS A PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN’S REPENTANCE AND SUBMISSION TO CHRIST.**

There can be no forgiveness of sins unless there is acknowledgement of sin that needs to be forgiven. Preaching to the Jews

at Pentecost, Peter said, “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Baptism is here seen as an evidence of genuine repentance — God may read the heart but to those standing by repentance could only be seen in the act of baptism.

Baptism is a sign of the sinner’s total surrender and submission to Christ — an acknowledgement that his sins were responsible for His (Christ’s) death. Jesus Himself is our great example in this; though He had no sin to confess, yet His immersion in the waters of Jordan was an acknowledgement of His total submission to His Father’s will — and in response to this the Father publicly expressed his approval in the voice from heaven and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the saved, forgiven sinner is privileged to follow his Master’s footsteps and yield his life to the Father’s will and pleasure.

(b) **BAPTISM IS A CONFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST’S DEATH AND RESURRECTION AS THE ONLY GROUND OF SALVATION.**

“Buried with Him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with Him through faith in the operation of God” (Col. 2-12).

Peace with God can be found only through the gracious work of Christ accomplished in His death and rising again. The sinner deserves nothing but death, but in his immersion and emergence from the water he is reminded that Christ in his death and resurrection has for ever solved the problem of sin and death. Publicly he professes his faith in the crucified and glorified Lord as the only grounds of his acceptance, and claims by faith that eternal life which his risen Lord imparts to him. Without this faith in Christ’s atoning work baptism is a meaningless deception and a counterfeit of the truth.

(c) **BAPTISM IS ALSO A SYMBOL OF FORGIVENESS AND CLEANSING.**

“Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

The water itself has no cleansing virtue — it is merely a symbol of the “clean” water of the Word and of the Spirit of God acting on the heart and conscience (Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:26). “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean”

(Ezek. 36:25). "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22).

(d) BAPTISM IS A DECLARATION OF THE BELIEVER'S INTENTION TO LIVE AS A RENEWED, REBORN PERSON.

"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" (Rom. 6:4).

When Christ died and rose again, He died and rose as the representative of all who would later believe in Him; when He died, they died; when He rose, they rose. This identification with Christ is true of all believers (Eph. 2:5-6) and is reckoned to each individual as he or she turns to Christ in faith.

In baptism, however, the "dead" and "risen" believer openly identifies himself with his Master and declares his intention TO LIVE IN THIS LIFE AS IF HE WERE IN FACT DEAD AND RISEN WITH CHRIST (Romans 6:13).

Baptism is therefore a grave in which I sever my connection with the world that rejected my Lord, and in it I take my place with Him as one dead to its sinful customs and practices (Gal. 6:14). The cross that saves me becomes at the same time the cross that slays me; on the cross Christ was judged for me — in baptism I pass the sentence of death on myself.

Baptism is not merely a public profession that I intend to lead a better life, to keep the law, or "turn over a new leaf" — it is a confession that I simply cannot please God at all in the flesh and it is a committal of my whole life to Him, that He in my "dead" body will work in resurrection power, producing in my life His own likeness and the fruit of the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 4:19, 6:22; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10-11; Gal. 2:20).

Peter refers to baptism as "the answer of a good conscience toward God . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21). As Noah and his family in the ark passed through the waters of the flood to a new life and a new beginning, so the believer begins a new life through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Paul likewise reminds the Corinthian Christians that the Israelites were "baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:2) — once for all severing their association with Egypt and its ways.

It is possible, of course, for one to live such a separated life without being baptised (or to live a worldly life after baptism), but the world knows well enough that baptism by immersion is the sign of the believer's separation from it and it is quite prepared to tolerate or even commend a professing Christian provided he does not take this final step of severance from it. Many a Christian is aware of this undercurrent of feeling and opposition to true baptism, and for fear of reproach they choose to remain on the "safe" side and stifle their prickings of conscience. Many who make "decisions" for Christ would think twice if they knew that God expected them to confess their decision in believer's baptism. Baptism is therefore something the mere professor will shun, but it is a God-given opportunity in which the true believer can glorify Christ.

(e) BAPTISM ALSO EXPRESSES THE NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WHICH THE BELIEVER ENJOYS IN CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

"Baptising them into (not 'in') the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

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

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptised, who have received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:47).

It is impossible to separate the Persons of the Trinity; to be baptised into the Holy Spirit is to be baptised into Christ. The coming of the Spirit brings the believer into vital union with the Father and the Son—

"In whom (Christ) ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22).

"If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode in him" (John 14:23).

In Old Testament times the "Name" of God could never have been identified with the Hebrews on account of their guilt, but now with the work of redemption being complete, Christ the High Priest being in heaven, the saved sinner shares "with" and "in" Christ all the gracious benefits of the New Covenant. The triune God takes redeemed men and women into union

with Himself in anticipation of the day when they will live and reign with Christ in his eternal glory.

This remarkable union in the Godhead is quite amazing and soul-stirring and is expressed by the believer in his immersion in the water of baptism. To be baptised into Christ, says Paul, is to "put on Christ" (Amplified Version — "clothed yourselves with Christ"; Living New Testament — "enveloped by Him") — as a person reclothes himself after his baptism.

(f) **FINALLY, BAPTISM SIGNIFIES THE UNION THAT EXISTS BETWEEN FELLOW BELIEVERS IN THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH — THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

"In one Spirit we are all baptised into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

"Is Christ divided? Were ye baptised in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13).

Water baptism does not make one a member of the church in either its universal or local aspect, but to the Spirit-indwelt believer his immersion indicates the vital union that unites him to fellow Christians. In seeking to promote unity and harmony among the Christians at Corinth, Paul appeals to the fact that they had all been baptised in the Name of CHRIST — not in his name. It is highly probable that baptism in water was a necessary condition for fellowship in the local churches themselves (Acts 2:41).

4. THE DEPARTURE FROM NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM.

While the New Testament churches walked in the truth of the gospel, no problem arose regarding the significance of baptism. It was not long, however, before Satan began to attack the witness, and in a comparatively short time the process of salvation was reversed, and the teaching began to develop that

(a) **THROUGH BAPTISM ITSELF SALVATION COULD BE OBTAINED.**

For the first two centuries after Christ the Christians were persecuted, but the faith of the gospel remained pure. In the third century, however, the church was recognised by the State and it immediately lost its pilgrim character as a separate called-out

company of people; it began to view itself as a kind of "kingdom" on earth and became an "institution" having power and authority to convey the blessings of the gospel through its own self-appointed priests and ministers. It ceased to be the true "church" entered by repentance, faith and rebirth, and became instead that sphere of religious profession today known as "Christianity," and baptism became the initiatory rite by which it was claimed souls were saved and the church entered.

Baptism no longer carried the "reproach" of the cross. Instead of being an open confession of sin and need, and an indication of faith in the crucified Saviour, baptism lost its "sting" and meaning and became instead something greatly to be desired and sought after with promise of untold blessings. Bishop Gregory in 390 A.D. described it as "the gift, the grace, the immersion, the anointing, the robe of immortality, the bath of the new birth, the seal and in general all things glorious."

Baptism became a "sacrament" — the divinely appointed "means of grace" — a religious ceremony possessing almost magical powers, with the natural result that it became not merely a means of obtaining salvation, but an absolute necessity. To die without baptism was to be eternally and irretrievably lost.

In the waters of baptism, therefore, the "church" possessed a power which it exercised to the full, and ambitious to extend its boundaries, it baptised thousands of pagans into its fold. From the fourth century every Roman citizen was required by law to belong to the state church, entered only by baptism. The church united with the state to strengthen its position and for centuries any person who was baptised by an unordained clergyman or who, unordained, baptised others, was liable to be put to death.

A more tolerant attitude is generally shown today but it is nevertheless a fact that millions of people still view baptism as a necessary initiatory rite by which **alone** the blessings of God can be received, and which can be administered only by a duly "authorised" person — be he priest, clergyman or Mormon elder. The person baptised is said to be "passive" in the act and "receives" baptism as an Old Testament Israelite received circumcision. He is "brought" to Christ by the church, "made" a member of the church, but he does not "come" himself.

The major denominations vary in the words used in the formula spoken at baptism for there is little agreement as to what is actually "imparted" to the baptised person. In general,

however, almost all the blessings of the gospel outlined above as received by faith and the Holy Spirit are said to be conferred in baptism — sins are forgiven — the Holy Spirit is imparted — the soul is regenerated — the church is entered — all are made “members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.” The vast ecumenical movement views baptism as the “basis of union” among all uniting churches.

Some endeavour to meet the faith-Christian halfway by stating that repentance and faith are necessary to make baptism valid but that it is in the act of baptism itself that the blessings are imparted.

The claim that baptism itself conveyed the blessings of the gospel led naturally to the belief that

(b) THE BLESSING OF GOD COULD BE IMPARTED TO INFANTS WITHOUT THE NECESSITY FOR REPENTANCE AND FAITH OR ANY INTELLIGENT UNDERSTANDING ON THEIR PART.

It is not clear when the practice of infant baptism commenced. The first reference to it is found in the writings of Tertullian about the year 200 A.D. who writes against it — “The delay of baptism is preferable, principally in the case of little children . . . let them become Christians when they have been able to know Christ.” The “Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church” states, “The New Testament contains no specific authority for the administration of baptism to infants.”

Once established, however, the practice spread rapidly — it was at least a comparatively easy way to make sure the children would be saved; and since no repentance, “death” or “resurrection” was involved, the sprinkling of water was more suitable and convenient — it did not carry with it the “humbling” aspect that was involved in immersion. The large baptistries used for immersion (still seen in some old churches) were abandoned for the familiar “fonts” where “Christening” has become the popular practice.

Not all submitted to the change, but to oppose the decrees of the state church councils was to invite opposition and thus it came about. To baptise by immersion one who had already been sprinkled as an infant became an act of blasphemy. Thus “for 1200 years Biblical baptism was branded as a civil crime punishable by death” (Warns).

The Emperor Charles V in 1529 decreed that “all and every anabaptist and re-baptised man or woman of intelligent age shall be sentenced and executed by fire, sword or the like, according to the standing of the person.” The sixteenth century emphasised a return to the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith but the reforming churches did not free themselves from the accumulated centuries of tradition, and bitter opposition continued against all those practising immersion or anabaptism — the baptism, by immersion, of children previously sprinkled.

The opposition consisted not so much in objection to the manner of baptism itself, as to the claim (which immersion clearly portrays) that one could be saved by faith in Christ apart from the “services” of the church and its clergy.

THE REASONS USUALLY BROUGHT FORWARD FOR INFANT BAPTISM ARE —

(1) The male children of Jewish parents were by reason of physical descent brought by circumcision into the blessings promised to the nation of Israel. This was true, however, only in so far as the circumcised walked in the fear of God; disobedience robbed them of any blessings they might otherwise have enjoyed. Romans 9:8 makes this quite clear, “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Circumcision in the Old Testament finds its counterpart in the putting off of the “old man,” the “body of sins,” through the cross of Christ — a practice requiring faith and decision on the part of the believer (Col. 2:11-13).

(2) The children of the Israelites who came out of Egypt passed through the Red Sea with their parents, thus these, together with all who were subsequently born in the wilderness, were all on “resurrection ground” and thus automatically became the children of God. It is true that Israel as a race was in a privileged position and had a real “claim” to the “blessings promised to the fathers,” but these blessings required faith on their part (which they did not have) and acceptance of the coming Redeemer Christ (which they did not do) — they “entered not in because of unbelief.” Baptism today, however, is an acknowledgement of faith in that Redeemer and an acceptance of that which Israel refused.

(3) The Lord Jesus said, “Suffer little children and forbid

them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). We thank God indeed for the truths of this verse but there is no suggestion that they were baptised as were the adults — He merely placed His hands on them in blessing. All parents have every right to seek the blessing of God on their children and, provided they give diligence to instruct them in the ways of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; Eph. 6:4), they may expect to see a work of grace in their lives. All children are precious and dear to the Lord and baptism will not make them more so.

(4) At Pentecost Peter said to the Jews, "The promise (of the Spirit) is unto you and to your children" (Acts 2:39). It is fairly clear here that Peter is referring, not to the infants present, but to the succeeding generations of Jews who would be born — to those whom the Lord would "call." In chapter 3:25 he refers to the Jews themselves as being "children of the prophets."

(5) There were children in the various "households" baptised in the New Testament. There is, of course, no proof of this; indeed the references would seem to suggest otherwise. The word "household" means "personnel" — not necessarily "family."

(a) In the house of Cornelius all were "present before God to hear" and the Spirit fell on "all them which heard the word," and all "magnified God" (Acts 10:33, 45-46).

(b) There is no suggestion that Lydia was married; her household was probably comprised of servants; there were "brethren" amongst them (Acts 16:14, 40).

(c) In the house of the jailor "all" heard the word and "all" believed (Acts 16:32, 34).

(d) Crispus and all his house "believed on the Lord" (Acts 18:8).

(e) The house of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16) "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (ch. 16:15).

(6) 1 Corinthians 7:14 states that the children of Christian parents are "holy." The context of the passage, however, teaches that if **one parent** is a believer then the unconverted parent, as well as the children, are declared to be "holy" — not in the sense that they were thus made believers or that any moral change had taken place within them, but that the blessing of God rests on the union and that separation was not demanded.

There is no suggestion that the unsaved partner or the children were to be baptised.

(7) Perhaps the most subtle argument adduced in favour of infant baptism is that, in view of the fact that Christ died for all men (including children) at a time when they neither knew nor believed, it is therefore possible for the church to "sign" or "seal" this salvation to the children irrespective of their knowledge or belief. This is said to be done in the baptismal ceremony; as one has written, "When I take a little child and baptise it, I place its life under the sign of the cross and it has the mark of the cross upon it for ever."

It is certainly a blessed fact that "Christ died for all" and that through His gracious work on our behalf God can now deal in mercy with people everywhere, however little they may understand the full extent of what Christ has accomplished. Indeed it is very likely that ALL innocent children, apart from faith, knowledge or baptism, share through the goodness of God the results of His death, for "of such is the kingdom of heaven." God in His sovereignty, however, is not dependent on the services of a priest or minister to save a soul or form the church. Nor is it right to say that a baptised child has a better chance of entering heaven than an unbaptised one, especially in view of the fact that large numbers who were "sealed" in infancy later lose all interest in their "salvation."

Christian parents will, naturally enough, always be interested in the spiritual welfare of their children and there are good Scriptural grounds for believing that God has a special interest in them (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15); but vast numbers of parents (Christian and otherwise), believing that the salvation of their children is somehow or other connected with baptism, rush them off to their pastor or priest as soon as possible in order to make them "children of God."

This is the unfortunate result of viewing baptism as a "means of grace," and not as a personal confession of faith. By contrast, how seldom do we find unbaptised, "enlightened" adults rushing off to get baptised when left to decide for themselves! "Our children must go as a matter of course and custom before they have a chance to say 'No' — but as for ourselves, no, we'll take the risk and stay as we are!"

In spite, however, of the widespread claims that the sacramental churches make for baptism whether to infants or adults,

by immersion or sprinkling, it is a remarkable fact that nobody dares state with any certainty just what blessings are really conferred, nor will any declare that such blessings, if conferred at all, are abiding or effectual for ultimate entrance into heaven and acceptance before God. Everything is fluid, indefinite, uncertain.

Some state that baptism is valid only if the candidate has himself faith in the efficacy of his baptism, and that he "intends" to be baptised. Others that it is effectual only if the officiating minister uses the correct "form" and "matter," and really "intends" to perform the ceremony. Calvin believed it was beneficial only to the "elect," that is, to the unknown number whom God has chosen.

In the case of infants the responsibility for its effectiveness is placed directly on the parents or the "godparents" who are required to make vows by proxy on behalf of the infant who is unable to express his own opinion on the matter. Parents, of course, have a serious responsibility to instruct their children in the faith, but it is to be feared that most parents look upon the ceremony as an easy way of relieving themselves of this responsibility; thus it has the opposite effect to that desired. The parents, Christian or non-Christian, feel that the church has accepted responsibility for the child's spiritual welfare and there the matter rests.

All who baptise children agree that the child himself must at a later date voluntarily acquiesce in what the parents and the church "did to him" in infancy and express a desire to be "confirmed" and "join the church." The original baptism, it is asserted, merely placed the child in the "way of salvation" — salvation was "offered" to him but the actual reception required the later decision of the child. The "regenerated" child must still be "born again"; the forgiven child must still be forgiven; the child who received the Spirit in infancy must still receive the Spirit in confirmation; the child who was received into the church of God at birth must still join the church.

But what actually happens? When left to face the decision for themselves, do the "baptised" children anxiously wait the day when they may voluntarily "confirm" the previous action of the church? Not at all. In Britain alone, of the 27 million baptised Anglicans, less than ten million have been confirmed and fewer than three million are registered church members. (What has happened to the remainder? Are they still "members of Christ

and children of God"? What will their eternal destiny be? We are safe in assuming that the majority haven't the faintest idea. During the fourth century baptism was frequently delayed till death was imminent lest the candidate should during his lifetime lose his "blessings" by some failure on his part; baptism thus became a denial of what it was supposed to represent — the completeness of the work of Christ.

Some claim that baptism of infants is merely a "dedication" — a committal of the child to God's care. There is no reason why parents should not dedicate or present their children to the Lord in the presence of the gathered church, if they so desire: but this can well be done without baptism. If, however, the baptism of infants is nothing more than a dedication, then the churches concerned should have no objection to a true baptism taking place at a later date — but this they are reluctant to do. Church leaders generally look with disapproval on the suggestion that baptism is only a dedication.

Someone may ask, "Well, what harm is in the practice? It is more important to preach the gospel than to preach baptism." With this we agree, but can one preach a true gospel and at the same time practice infant baptism and sprinkling? Compromise in this question, somehow, somewhere, involves a compromise in the gospel itself.

Infant baptism and sprinkling —

(a) Misleads multitudes of people into thinking they are "children of God" already and these become harder to reach than those "outside." The preaching of the gospel is undermined and only with great difficulty are the "baptised" brought to repentance and faith. What an awful awakening it will be for the unsaved church member who finds in the end that his baptism avails him nothing; and what an awakening for those who misled him!

(b) Is in itself a denial of the true work of Christ, for the symbolism of salvation through His death, burial and resurrection is lost.

(c) Robs true believers of an opportunity of publicly confessing their faith in Christ in a Scriptural manner. While we do not believe that baptism is a "means of grace" in the sense of being the channel through which divine gifts are received, yet it is true that public confession of Christ in baptism can be a

means of real blessing in a believer's life, and it is frequently the turning point from a lifeless profession to a life of vital witness for God. The baptised believer is more likely to grow in grace, to advance in the knowledge of the Scriptures, to enjoy fellowship with Christ (Phil. 3:10), and to be a blessing to others. One may not necessarily understand all about baptism when it is observed but appreciation of it is bound to come later.

Ought those who turn to Christ in later years be re-baptised? This term is not strictly correct, for previous baptism, either by immersion or sprinkling, when observed apart from faith in Christ, was not really Christian baptism at all, since it was not a true confession. Generally speaking, however, most persons baptised prior to conversion were not responsible for what they did (or what was done to them) and there does not appear to be any valid reason why they should not be obedient to Christ when light is given them. Sometimes there are cases of doubt as to whether an adult person was a believer at a previous immersion; the decision in each case will have to be left to the person concerned. The twelve disciples referred to in Acts 19:1-7 had been baptised by immersion in acknowledgement of their sin but were later re-baptised as believers in Christ.

It is obvious to the writer that in view of the confused lax thinking relating to the subject, a serious responsibility rests upon evangelists and teachers to place baptism back in its Spiritual setting and give converts and Christians a plain declaration of the privilege and responsibility that its observance brings upon them.

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