

*What Does the Bible
Teach About*

BAPTISM

With Remarks On
HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM

(*ABRIDGED*)

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FOREWORD

The paper of this title being out of print, this abridged form is sent forth because of a decidedly felt need on the part of the people of God.

The emphasis that is herein laid upon the meaning and significance of baptism is in happy contrast to any spirit of controversy, and furnishes salutary instruction in the ways of our God. The writer's careful, sober consideration of these matters in the clear light of Scripture, will, we trust, be of useful service to each reader.

If an unabridged edition is available to the reader, we fully recommend his careful reading of it; but in this edition we have omitted those parts that may not be of the most general interest and concern.

These pages of truth will be rightly used and valued insofar as they serve to deepen the reader's appreciation of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His great sacrificial work. To this end may He add His rich blessing.

Leslie M. Grant

What Does the Bible Teach About

BAPTISM

Possibly it would prove too great a demand to ask our readers to lay aside all preconceived ideas on the subject of baptism, and come to the consideration of the subject with altogether unbiassed minds. But, perhaps, it is not too much to ask that they will weigh impartially every statement here made and in the light of what Scripture teaches. There is hardly any other subject where this is more necessary, for we have imbibed ideas, and allowed ourselves to slip into habits of thought, which have no real foundation in Scripture whatever; and the consequence is the whole matter has become prejudiced by our preconceived notions. Baptism is one of those subjects we are apt to think we know all about. In reality, we know far less than we think we do. Moreover, many start from the wrong end. Their main question seems to be, Who should be baptized? A primary question surely is, What is the meaning and significance of the rite?

The two earliest records of the actual exercise of the rite of baptism refer to John the Baptist, and the Day of Pentecost. These instances will surely teach us something as to its meaning.

John's Baptism

Turning first to Matthew 3, and to the parallel passage in Luke 3, we are confronted with the fact that John's one effort was to convince all who came to his baptism of its significance and solemnity. He was not inviting people to come and to be baptized, simply. It was a baptism of repentance that he

preached, with terrible stress on repentance. Consequently, when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Luke informs us that he said the same to the multitude (or "crowd") which came. (Ch. 3:7). He termed them "a generation of vipers;" he declared "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees," and that every tree which did not bring forth good fruit would be hewn down and cast into the fire. Their relationship with Abraham, upon which they prided themselves so much, was of no avail; and their baptism meant the acceptance of this position. John did not baptize them because they had already accepted it and were true to it, for it is recorded that he said all this to them when they came to his baptism* He preached "the baptism of repentance for (or unto) the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4 margin). It was evident they were not forgiven first and then baptized, for apart from baptism no forgiveness was promised (see Luke 7: 29,30). They confessed their sins *in baptism* (Matt. 3:6), and his baptism was *unto* repentance (in view of it), and they pledged themselves to bring forth "fruits answerable to amendment of life" (Matt. 3:8 margin). In their baptism they owned that they were under judgment and only fit for the fire, and the absolute necessity of a new life.

That this was so is made perfectly plain by the evangelist Luke. In chapter 3:10,14, we read, "And the people asked him (John) saying, *What shall we do then?*" "Then came the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, *What shall we do?*" (This

*That his baptism was in view of a change, and not to demonstrate a change already there is confirmed by the following considerations: (1) John's position in the wilderness, remote from the haunts of men, prevented any intimate acquaintance with the daily lives of those who came to his baptism; (2) His style of address: he speaks to them as those needing repentance; (3) His baptism is said to be *unto* repentance; (4) The question addressed to him by all classes at their baptism, "What shall we do?"

makes it quite evident that they were baptized in view of amendment of life. It is not, We have lived an exemplary life, therefore baptize us, but baptize us and tell us what we ought to do so as to be in keeping with our baptism.) The soldiers make the same demand.

All this was equally in view of the coming of Christ. John was "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." Again, we read, "The people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not." And Paul's description of his baptism is, "*John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.*" Luke 3:4, 15; Acts 19:4. John's baptism, therefore, was in view of repentance and faith accompanied by amendment of life. The position having been made clear, baptism was administered to all who were willing to submit to the ordinance. This is confirmed by the statement in Luke 3:21, "Now when all the people were baptized." In that solemn baptism they professed to accept the judgment of God upon their condition, and came up from the waters of Jordan (significant of death) dedicated to newness of life, and in view of the coming of the Messiah to introduce a new era.

One can imagine the moral passion with which John preached the necessity of repentance to those who submitted to his baptism. "The wrath to come" "the axe laid unto the *root* of the trees"—"a generation of vipers"—the chaff to be burnt up "with unquenchable fire;" this formed the burden of his message: terrific in its indictment, and terrible in its warning, it left them no standing ground whatever and baptism was the solemn act which recognized its truth, and opened a door of escape, provided they were true to it. To suppose that he baptised only those who had sufficiently proved their repentance by having already exhibited fruits worthy of it, is to misconceive the situation entirely. Scripture de-

declares it to have been a baptism *unto* repentance. As much in view of repentance as of the coming of Christ.

Christian Baptism in Acts

Let us turn now to Acts 2, and to the Apostle Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost. The charge he brings against the nation of Israel is that they had crucified their Messiah. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God...ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." He follows this up by declaring what God had done. "This Jesus hath God raised up... Being by the right hand of God exalted." "God hath made that same Jesus, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." What was the effect of this? Those who heard were "pricked in their heart." Their enquiry is "What shall we do?" And Peter replies:—

"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. For the promise is unto you, and to your children — And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourself from this untoward generation."

There are certain points of resemblance here and in the passage already considered. And it is well to notice that although we have now entered a new dispensation this makes no difference whatever to the *general bearing* and essential significance of water baptism. Whatever difference exists, lies in the circumstances and not in the inherent character of the rite. Attention to this fact—for it is a fact—is of vital importance.

What are these points of resemblance?

1. Repentance stands on the forefront of both. And no repentance would have been recognized apart from the baptism.

2. In both cases a change of ground was the recognition of this. Just as John had said, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father," so Peter, with equal solemnity, declares, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." As though he said, "Renounce the act of which the

nation has been guilty, and this can only be done by baptism."

3. In both cases also those who submitted to baptism were baptised in view of something. Here it was "in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," and with the further promise of the Holy Ghost.

Thus, whether it was John's baptism or Peters, this most significant rite became a public demonstration, of which all could take account, that the old order of things was forsaken, the old standing renounced. There was no hope according to the flesh, the only hope was in Christ. They must take new ground. Thus we see that the significance of baptism remains the same, though the circumstances connected with it may change. In John's day it was in view of what was about to happen, and at Pentecost in view of all that had happened. In either case it signified an entire change of situation.

How instructive to notice when, and under what circumstances baptism is introduced as we find it in Matt. 3. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament;* it is introduced only with the announcement that the old order is judged and about to disappear. Baptism is the introductory rite to a new order. The preaching that accompanied the first introduction of baptism leaves us in no doubt as to its significance. *Repentance* was the characteristic word—a word which always implies the most radical change. The axe was laid unto the root of the trees. Could any language express more forcibly all that baptism implies? Can there be any doubt as to its true significance? **

*The rite, it is supposed was to some extent practiced in connection with the admission of proselytes into Judaism, but we speak from the point of view of a divine sanction.

**How strikingly and impressively baptism as a symbol sets forth the actual situation, as declared by both John the Baptist and the Apostle Peter. Both pronounced judgment upon the generation and the order of things with which all the hopes of the people they addressed were associated. Could any act so unmistakably set forth the acceptance of this verdict and all that it involved as publicly to go down and disappear in a watery grave and rise again in view of a new order and a new life?

Before considering how far these views find a place in the teaching of the epistles, it may be well to consider a passage in the Acts which marks the transition from John's baptism to Christian baptism. At the close of Acts 18, we read of Apollos, that he knew only of the baptism of John. Paul comes to Ephesus and finds disciples who had been baptized unto John's baptism only, and they had not received the Holy Ghost. He explains that John's baptism was preparatory to faith in Christ, and they are accordingly baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. "And when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them."

The great difference between the two baptisms does not lie in what baptism is in itself, or in what it signifies, but in the fact that the one was in view of Christ's mission, and was not done in His Name, or, indeed, in any name, as far as we are told, whereas the other is in the Name of the Lord Jesus and unto His death. In this connection it may be well to quote John's own words. Referring to Christ he says, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not:" and again, "And I knew Him not, but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (John 1:26,31). Thus it is clear that John baptized in view of the manifestation about to take place, while Paul baptized in the name of One Who had been manifested, and who had died, risen again, and ascended to the right hand of God.

But it would be wrong to suppose that this in any way altered the character or meaning of the rite *in itself*. What baptism signified in John's day it signifies always. We refer simply to the significance of the rite. As we have seen, John's baptism meant that man had no standing in the flesh, nor any hope from it; he must take new ground: it means the same still. And there is one little word which occurs twice over in Acts 19, and is found both in the lips of Paul and of these disciples. It is the little word "unto." Paul inquires "Unto what then were ye bap-

tized?" And they answer, "Unto John's baptism" (v. 3). Give this little word its place, and the whole teaching as to baptism stands as clear as day. And in keeping with this they were baptized not because they had received the Holy Ghost, but in view of receiving Him. The difference between the two baptisms lay in the fact that Christian baptism was in the Name of One Who had died, risen and ascended, and was *unto* a new order of things consequent upon all this. But we repeat there was no essential difference in the significance of the rite itself.

Teaching of the Epistles

In the light of the foregoing remarks let us now consider the teaching of the epistles.

ROMANS 6

The first reference to the subject is in Romans 6. There we read:—

"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism unto 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" (vv 34).

Here, again, we are confronted with the fact that baptism is in view of something: baptized "unto" Jesus Christ, and baptized "unto" His death. We find too, it is introduced here, as elsewhere, in connection with a complete change of ground. The words with which it is introduced are: "How shall we that are dead (or have died) to sin live any longer therein?" Could there be a more complete change of front? And when did we take this ground? In baptism. The Apostle Paul does not assert, as so many seem to do in our day, "You died when you believed, and your baptism is an outward demonstration of it." There is not a word to this effect. The whole argument rests upon the fact of baptism. "Buried with Him *by baptism* unto death."

Here then is a complete change of attitude. And verses 10 and 11 of this same chapter give us a further explanation of the force of baptism, for the

statement is grounded upon it: "In that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed *unto* sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus."

Put in other words, what the Apostle says is this: "You have been baptized to Christ and to His death. In that baptism you have become identified with Him; consequently, what is true of Him and His death you are to reckon now as true of you. Did He die to sin? Yes, that was the meaning of His death. Then reckon it as true of you. Does He live unto God? Yes. Then you are alive unto God in Him. All this, in a most distinct and impressive way, he connects with baptism—and with nothing else. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death (baptism), we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (v. 5).

This truth as to baptism follows upon the truth of the previous chapter (v. 12), viz., that death has passed upon all men. Baptism is the acknowledgment of this tremendous fact—the fact of God's judgment upon me, as a man in the flesh. And as one has said, we "are buried to Christ's death as the object before us—not because we have died with Christ—but as taking that death for our hope and confidence." (F.C.J.)

We are baptized too, with a view to walking "*in newness of life.*" Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. No other life can be recognized. His death shuts everything else out. He alone is said to be raised. "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." We are buried with Him in baptism unto this.

In the light of such statements, what a tremendous thing baptism becomes. We are baptized to be like Christ. Planted together in the *likeness* of His death, and therefore dead to sin; *and*, that *like* as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, *even* so we also should walk in newness of

life—a life that in every phase of it has God in view —“alive unto God.” “Dead with Christ:” that is one side of baptism. “Alive unto God,” that is the other.

Unmistakably, the teaching here is on precisely similar lines to Matt. 3 and Acts 2. In those words, “we have died to sin,” what do we hear but the other solemn declaration, “The axe is laid unto the root of the trees?” While the words, “that we also should walk in newness of life,” correspond with “bring forth therefore fruits answerable to amendment of life.” In baptism we own God’s judgment upon our position, and that our only hope is Christ, because of His death and resurrection.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1, 2

A most illuminating passage on baptism is found in 1 Cor. 10:1, 2:

“All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

The terms used, and the figures employed in describing this baptism, correspond precisely with what we have already become familiar with (Matt. 3 and Romans 6.) They “were *baptized unto* Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The cloud signified Divine guidance, and as Moses was the appointed leader, the act of baptism signified that they had accepted his leadership. The sea separated them from Egypt. They left their former history and its connections behind forever. This is precisely what we learned as to baptism in Romans 6. “So many of you as were baptized unto Jesus Christ”— leadership; “were baptized unto His death”— that death separating us from sin and the world just as the actual sea separated Israel from Egypt.

In the passage we are considering, the meaning and significance of the rite of baptism is seen to be in keeping with what has already been before us. It was a new departure in the ways of God. He had never had a people outwardly in association with Himself before. He had never dwelt with them in Egypt: He will do so now; *and accordingly they are baptized.*

In their baptism they died to one order of things, and entered upon a new order. They were baptized unto a deliverer, and they renounced Egypt and its works—the old life of sin and slavery. And they should have walked so as to please God—in “newness of life,” but with many of them, alas! God was not well pleased (1 Cor. 10:4, 5). Here, again, it was not the act of baptism that was sufficient. It was the life which followed that mattered.

1 PETER 3:20-24

“The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer (demand) of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

This is one of the most crucial passages in regard to baptism we have yet considered; and the right understanding of it would settle many doubts and difficulties. If we are to comprehend the Apostle Peter’s meaning we must consider the introduction of baptism here with some regard to the context.

It is introduced in connection with Noah and his family being saved by (or through) water at the time of the flood. And it is of all importance to notice that “water” is mentioned, and not the ark, for it is with reference to the water he adds, “*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.*” Such language would be incongruous if applied to the ark, for there is no resemblance between the ark and baptism. Both the ark and the water saved Noah, but they saved in different ways. And the same applies to faith and baptism. Each saves in its own way. If this is remembered it will help us to understand the place baptism fills. Faith stands related to certain things, but baptism stands related to certain other things.

This becomes additionally clear as we think in what way Noah and his family were saved *by water*.

In this, that, the water destroyed the old world, full of corruption and violence, which was under God's judgment, and with which they once had been connected, and brought them into a new world. In principle, baptism saves us in precisely the same way. This "present evil world" is a judged scene, because of the rejection of Christ. "Now is the judgment of this world." In baptism we leave it; we are baptized unto His death; but through the resurrection a new world is brought to pass, and the apostle Peter, before concluding his remarks, brings that new world into view: "*The resurrection of Jesus Christ,*" he says, "*Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*" Such is the world we are baptized in view of— a world of inconceivable majesty and splendour, where everything is in subjection to our Lord Jesus Christ, and in which God can rest. Baptism saves because it is the acknowledgment of our true state and brings us into a true position. We own that this world is under judgment, and look to another where all is according to God.

We can also claim a good conscience. For baptism is the acceptance of the fact of God's judgment upon man after the flesh and the world to which he belongs, and is also the acknowledgment that there is no hope apart from the death and resurrection of Christ. Faith alone can give actual and eternal salvation. But the passage before us is concerned with the way in which baptism saves.

The simile is thus complete. In Noah's case there was an old world and a new, and he was brought through water out of one into the other; and in our case there is an old world and a new, and the waters of baptism sever us from the one and link us outwardly with the other. And the "good conscience" is on the ground that I have publicly broken with the order of things which God has rejected, and seek to be in harmony with a new order which He has established under the rule and authority of Him to Whose Name I am baptized.

If the apostle's statement in his epistle is considered in the light of what took place at Pentecost we shall perhaps better understand it. On that occasion he urged, "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." Faith is not even mentioned, though of course, it is implied, but it is evident that what the apostle presses is baptism. It may be said that this was due to special circumstances. Granted. But instead of this fact obscuring the truth as to baptism it only brings it into greater relief. Could those people have had a good conscience, had they refused baptism? Impossible. If they had not been baptized they would still have been *outwardly* associated with their old standing and with the guilty nation. Blessing, so far as they were concerned, is made to depend upon repentance and baptism. Thus a good conscience depended *in their case* upon submission to this rite. For how could they have had a good conscience while outwardly associated with what was so contrary to God? Baptism could alone be a public declaration that they severed their connection with what called for Divine judgment. And in this way they responded to Peter's exhortation, "*Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*" This was as imperative in their case as in Noah's; and it was accomplished in the same way, by water.

Moffat's translation of the words as to baptism in 1 Peter 3 is: "But the prayer for a clean conscience before God." It demands it on the ground of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for that is what baptism is in view of. The Greek word variously rendered "answer," "demand," "prayer," "interrogation," is admittedly a difficult one, but in any case the meaning of the passage cannot be that a good conscience demands baptism and that you are baptized *because* you have one; for baptism is the nominative of the sentence, and it is what baptism demands. It demands it because in it you take true ground.

Thus we see that the teaching of 1 Peter 3:20-24

as to baptism is in strict harmony with all that has gone before. In Matt. 3 the people had to realize that judgment was upon all, and to be in outward relationship with God they must take new ground. In Acts 2 they are called upon to recognize that a new order of things is established in Jesus Christ Whom the nation had rejected, and they must be baptized in His name. In Romans 6, 1 Cor. 10 and 1 Peter 3 we equally, through baptism, pass out of one sphere into another. In every case it is a change of place and not of state; though in every case, likewise, to be true to it implies a change of state.

The Great Commission

MATTHEW 28:18-20

We are now in a position to consider what is commonly known as the "great commission;" and in the light of what we have already learned we shall be better able to understand the true significance of our Lord's reference to baptism.

The passage reads as follows:

"All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach (make disciples of--literally 'discipleise'-it is a verb) all nations, baptizing them in (to, or 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 alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28:18-20.)

Now this must not be confounded with the commission in Mark 16, as though the two passages were exactly on all fours. Both are equally necessary, but this does not mean that both are the same. Nor does the passage in Matthew, to become intelligible, need that in Mark incorporated into it, or as if it needed supplementing and could not stand alone. Each should be regarded from its own standpoint. As regards the statement in Mark, it may help us if we consider the order of the words: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" Not, "*He that believeth and is saved shall be baptized as a public witness that he is saved.*" As we have already had occasion to point out from passage after passage, a certain aspect of

salvation is connected with baptism, and consequently our Lord places it before salvation in the passage referred to. "He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved." The faith spoken of has to do with justification before God; baptism with the leaving a place to which condemnation attaches, and being brought where blessing is to be found. There must be the outward association with Christ and confession of Him in baptism.

Bearing this in mind we shall be enabled to perceive the force of the commission as given in Matthew. Our Lord has in view more particularly the second aspect of salvation, and therefore He emphasises baptism, and says not a word as to faith. Indeed the contrast between the two passages (Matt. and Mark) might be said to lie just there. Mark presents the faith side uppermost, so to speak; while Matthew presents the other side, viz., discipleship and baptism. And this aspect is strikingly in keeping with the whole tenor of Matthew's gospel. He approaches matters very much from the outside, e.g., the parable of the labourers; the unforgiving servant; the foolish virgins; the man without a wedding garment (chaps. 18-22.). We must regard the commission in Matthew from this standpoint. The command is, "Go ye, therefore, and make *disciples* of all nations." The simple meaning of *disciple* is learner, and has to do with becoming *outwardly* identified with a teacher. A disciple was not *necessarily* a believer, in the true sense at all. Nor is a believer necessarily "a disciple indeed." To confound these terms would be disastrous. In Luke 14 we find it stated that, "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, etc., yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Who would ever dream of substituting 'believer' for 'disciple' here? It would falsify the whole teaching of Scripture. Justification by faith is never presented in such a connection; but discipleship is. Because discipleship has to do with an outward path. "Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John," we read. And from John 6:66, we learn that many of

these disciples "went back and walked no more with Him:" this gives us the idea of discipleship—outward identification. Whether any of these disciples were true believers only God knows.

Discipleship, then, is *outward* identification ("Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple"), and *outward* identification is by *baptism*. This, as we have seen, is *always* the significance of baptism, and it is so in Matt. 28. In keeping with this a reference to baptism immediately follows the words already quoted: "Baptizing them unto the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

John's baptism no longer sufficed. The baptism here stands related to two new and stupendous facts. On the one hand, all power in heaven and earth committed to Christ; and, on the other, the full and complete revelation of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But, be it noted again, the difference is not in the significance of the rite itself, but in what disciples were baptized "unto."

The apostles went forth to proclaim their Master as Lord—the One to Whom all power and all authority in heaven and earth was committed, for this is the significance of Lordship. Every sphere was under His control, whether it was heaven or earth, and thus all nations were to be discipled. Did any wish to bow to His authority and become outwardly identified with Him, baptism was the symbol. And what was this in view of? To become acquainted with all that was enfolded in that ineffable Name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. They were baptized to that Name. Who can measure the blessings and the possibilities of such a baptism? Name implies nature. God's own Name— God's own nature— the alone limit of the blessing. What character of blessing must it be which is determined by such a revelation? All this was in view in their baptism, though faith alone could bring a soul *really* into possession of it.

But this baptism involved responsibilities as well. It is important, however, to notice the order. Grace first. Christianity is not merely a religion, it is a revelation—all that is covered by the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and faith is the response to that revelation. Before we have to take up our responsibilities we are placed in the full clear light of all that God is, revealed in grace—all that He undertakes to be to the one that turns to Him through Christ. Thus we have the Triune Name, and each member of the Trinity engaged for our blessing—the favour of each and all resting upon us—before we come to what we have to observe. Nevertheless this follows, and we are pledged to this observance in our baptism: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Here we see, as in Romans 6, we are baptized to “walk in newness of life.”

Can we not see how all this bears upon discipleship? and also how entirely in keeping it is with what we have seen in connection with John’s baptism? They come to him to be baptized and receive instruction. They ask, “What shall we do?” and they are told (Luke 3:12). So here, the order is, “Baptizing them,” “Teaching them.” In view of all this it is not difficult to imagine the reflections of an earnest and sincere disciple of those early days in prospect of baptism. “I am about,” he might have said to himself, “to identify myself with One Who claims to have all power in heaven and in earth. The Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to which I am baptized alone can express the fullness of the blessing that may be mine. But what a responsibility also! I undertake to observe all things commanded by Jesus Christ.” Can we not understand what baptism would have meant to such an one? It means nothing less to any one of us today.

Why is so much of its solemnity and significance often unrealized? Mainly because we are so much under the power of circumstances, and so little in

the light of Scripture; and consequently we have hardly any true conception of the place that baptism fills. It may be said that circumstances have largely changed, and that, in the nature of things, baptism cannot mean in a country that has been Christianized all that it meant at the beginning, or might still mean in a heathen land.

To which there is a threefold reply. (1) We are not concerned here either with circumstances or country, but only with what the Bible teaches as to the significance of the rite. (2) Baptism is still practised, and, if so, it should be accompanied by proper instruction as to its meaning. (3) Romans 6 is as much in force, and its requirements are as imperative, as at any time during the past 2,000 years; and much of the instruction of that chapter is based on baptism.

Water baptism is introduced for the first time in Scripture at a moment of tremendous crisis, and comes between the passing away of one order and the inauguration of another. It is at such a parting of the ways that baptism finds its place, and we beg our readers to take careful note of this pregnant and illuminating fact. For this fact casts its light upon baptism wherever we find it. The significance that attaches to it at the beginning characterizes it always and everywhere. Circumstances may change, what baptism is introductory to may alter, but what it denotes as regards *itself* never varies. It always signifies the close of one order in view of the establishment of another, and the passing by that act—the act of baptism—from one to the other. This it meant in John's day: this it also meant on the day of Pentecost. It was not otherwise with the twelve disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19). The baptism of John did not carry them far enough; they had to be brought on to other ground by Christian baptism: but in each case it meant, *as far as the rite itself was concerned*, one and the same thing, a change of ground. Noah passed from one outward condition of things to another by water, and an inspired writer tells us that

baptism is a like figure. Israel did the same through the cloud and the sea. And all this, as we have seen, finds its strict counterpart in the teaching of Romans 6, and in our Lord's instructions to His disciples in Matt. 28.

NOT "An outward sign of an inward work"

A little consideration would surely convince us that baptism does not demonstrate outwardly what has already taken place inwardly. Not only is such a conception untrue to all the teachings of Scripture, but such a demonstration is entirely superfluous. The world is not convinced by such a demonstration, and God does not need it. Baptism is an external matter, and relates to external matters. Scripture always assigns to it a place of its own and attributes to it certain actions. If a Mohammedan professed to believe, but refused baptism, he could not be said to be dead to Mohammedanism, and therefore how can baptism be a demonstration that he is already dead? Baptism is something of itself, and stands for something and effects something. It is the rite by which we are brought into the *outward* sphere of Christianity.*

As in all else, we may learn the truth of a matter by looking at it in relation to our Lord Jesus Christ, so is it in the case of baptism. He was baptized. What did His baptism mean? Did it demonstrate outwardly what had already taken place inwardly? Far be the thought. It will be objected, But our Lord stands alone. All the more reason, and not the less, why His case should help us to understand the significance of baptism. The difference between Him and ourselves does not affect in the least the nature and bearing of the rite *as to its essential character*. What, then, did His baptism mean? It meant that He asserted and claimed nothing on His own behalf,

*The Outward sphere of Christianity is the Kingdom of Heaven into which water baptism introduces the baptized person. The Baptism of the Spirit introduces the believer into the One Body, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13). --Ed.

though absolutely sinless and perfect, and thus He took his place in the waters of death; and, secondly, it meant that He outwardly identified Himself with those who had justified God in the position they had taken in submitting to John's baptism (Luke 7:29, 30). The language of Ps. 16 is applicable here, "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." And with this accords the answer given to the young ruler who addressed Him as "Good Master." "Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but One, that is God" (Mark 10:18). This is the position He took in baptism before men. It was no question of what was inherently true of Him. In this respect there was no identification with anyone else. He stood alone. But in baptism He identified Himself with others in an outward position.

Summary

To sum up. Baptism is the initiatory rite by which we enter the outward sphere of Christianity. Those who listened to Peter's message in the house of Cornelius received the gift of the Holy Ghost while he yet spake. They were baptized with water, not as a demonstration of what was within, for nobody needed such demonstration: it was there, "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." It was the appointed means of admission *outwardly* into the kingdom. (See also 1 Cor. 10:1-4) Further, we are baptized not *because* certain things are true of us, but in order that they may be true of us. That "we should walk in newness of life." In John's day it was "unto repentance" and they were to answer to all that their baptism implied.

Baptism does something, and it does what nothing else does. "Buried with Him *by baptism* unto death."

Though an inward experience, and that of a most real and blessed character, had come to pass in many before they were baptized, nevertheless baptism does not stand related to that—for it differed in different cases—but to an external position. It is a change of ground, in every case, and connects us outwardly with what God has established on the earth.

Baptism is identification with Christ and with His death. We reckon ourselves thus to have died to sin, and to the world, and to find our life in a new sphere. Baptism thus becomes the public recognition that God's judgment is upon everything of man, and that our only hope is in Christ. A more solemn and significant symbol of all this, it would be impossible to conceive.

If the teaching of Scripture here presented seems in conflict with long cherished opinions, may the reader have both grace and humility to test his views by the one infallible standard. The views presented here will not diminish his estimate of baptism, but enhance it.

It may be that just as the rite of baptism was introduced in view of the first coming of Christ, and of the tremendous changes impending at that time, so, today, God may be calling attention to its true nature and significance in view of the imminence of Christ's Second Coming. Certainly there can be no truer or more effectual preparation, as far as the child of God is concerned, for that solemn event, than that he should recognize what his baptism meant, and be true to it.



Remarks on

HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM

Both in the Acts and in the epistle of Paul to the Corinthians we read of the baptism of households. The significance of this is sometimes overlooked, and sometimes entirely rejected. If baptism applied only to those who had reached the age of responsibility, and had exercised personal faith in the Saviour, why speak of households at all? It could have no meaning. Nor is it as if the inspired writers were drawing special attention to the fact that all within a certain household were grown up, and it had so turned out that every one of them had become a true believer. There is not a word to indicate that this is the point of the reference in any single case, not excepting that of the Philippian jailor, as we trust to show. Indeed, those who reject household baptism are driven to the necessity of attempting to prove that circumstances warrant the assumption that households referred to could only have contained people of responsible age. As if God had spoken about the baptism of households, and left us to discover whether they contained children.

Seeing then there is, at all events, a probability that the inspired writers intended to suggest something different from the interesting fact that all the members of a particular household had exercised personal faith in the Saviour— which, let it be observed, they do *not* state— let us inquire, What are the reasons for household baptism?

The *principle* is found everywhere in Scripture. Ever since God said to Noah, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark," the head of the house and his house have been linked together.* We need not there-

*Noah's house was taken into the ark on the basis of his righteousness, not theirs. "For **thee** have I seen righteous before Me in this generation." Gen. 7:1 --Ed.

for be surprised that immediately Christianity is established the word "household" appears. It forms as much part of God's principle of action in this dispensation as in any other. The principle applied always and everywhere. If God makes a covenant with Abraham, circumcision is introduced, and is made to apply to the household. And so in Gen. 17:26 we read "*In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised and Ishmael his son.*" And again, Gen. 21:4, "And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him." How careful God was of this principle, and jealous for its maintenance, is revealed at the time of the exodus from Egypt. The instructions as to the Passover are as follows: "In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of the fathers, *a lamb for an house.*" The sign of Christ's death was upon the household.

In view of this striking and impressive fact, two things need not surprise us when we come to New Testament times: one, that the household is distinctly referred to, and the other, that there is no explicit direction to baptize the children of believers. One thing seems certain that had God for some reason or other, ceased to grant the privilege to the head of the house of associating his family with himself, we should certainly have been told in the plainest possible language. A departure so drastic from the ways of God which had extended over 2,000 years would certainly have been in some form put on record. As a matter of fact, there is no prohibition of any kind. Not so much as a syllable or a breath to indicate any change in this respect whatsoever. Strange, indeed, would it have been if a privilege so great as that of the head of a house associating his family with himself by some outward ceremony should have been withdrawn. And passing strange to be withdrawn without the slightest intimation.

On this aspect of the case we will quote the remarks of another:

“But of one thing we may be sure: had the acceptance of Christianity involved anything so startling to the Jewish or Gentile mind as a distinction between the religious standing of the father of a family and his children, the historian would have recorded it, or the Apostles would have found themselves called to explain and defend it. For such a distinction would have been in direct contradiction to the most deeply rooted conviction of the Jews and of Gentiles alike. From the time of Abraham onwards the Jew had felt it a solemn religious obligation to claim for his sons from their earliest infancy the same covenant relation with God as he himself stood in. There was sufficient parallelism between baptism and circumcision (cf. Col. 2:11) for the Jewish-Christian father to expect the baptism of his children to follow his own as a matter of course. And among Gentile converts a somewhat different but equally authoritative principle, that of *patria potestas* would have the same result. In a home organized on this principle, which prevailed throughout the Roman empire, it would be a thing inconceivable that the children could be severed from the father in their religious rites and duties, in the standing conferred by Baptism.

“Thus it is because to the mind of Jew and Gentile alike, the baptism of infants and children yet unable to supply the condition for themselves was so natural that St. Luke records so simply that when Lydia believed, she was baptized ‘with her household;’ when the Philippian jailer believed, he was baptized and all those belonging to him. If there were children in these households, these children were baptized on the ground of the faith of their parents.”

Everyone will feel that these statements have a most important bearing upon the whole question. And they receive additional strength and confirmation when we come to a consideration of what Scripture actually teaches with regard to the household of the jailer. Our authorized version does not

present the matter quite in its proper light. It makes it appear as if every member of the household exercised personal faith in God. The Greek suggests nothing of the kind: as is proved by at least four recognized translations.

Verse 34, in the Revised, runs: "And rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God."

Weymouth gives it: "And was filled with gladness, with his whole household, his faith resting on God."

J. N. Darby: "And rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God."

Englishman's Greek: "And exulted with all his house, having believed in God."

The fact is, in the entire passage there is not a word about the faith of anyone except the head of the house. And who can fail to notice the significant way in which, from first to last, the man and his household are bracketed together. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *thou and thy house.*" We quote the Revised here because this rendering gives additional emphasis to the point before us. It repeats the "thou." "Thou and thy house," that is the point. The apostles do not make faith on the part of the household a condition. It is a condition, of course, for forgiveness and eternal life. But the message did not run, "Believe thou and thy household, and thou and thy household shall be saved." Not that, but "Thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." Resting all for the moment upon his own faith. Had it been a matter of individual faith, how could the apostles have predicted that? But if the household was to be baptized as being identified with the head of it, and thus outwardly be brought on to Christian ground, all becomes intelligible, and we can rejoice in such a divine and gracious provision. (Salvation for the household, so far as the apostle's announcement went at the moment, was on the lines of Peter's reference to baptism— "baptism which doth also now

save us.”) And that this is the meaning is confirmed not only by the emphasis placed upon the original statement, “Thou and thy house,” but by the repetition of such words: “Baptized, he and all his.” “With all his house,” or “rejoiced householdedly” The repeated expressions as to his “house” and “all his” have really no force whatever apart from the principle we are contending for, and might just as well not have been used. If they were saved, as some assert, solely on the ground of their individual faith, then their salvation was due to that fact alone, and the question of belonging to the household or of belonging to the jailer had little or nothing to do with it. The use of such words proves that in New Testament times it was a foregone conclusion in people’s minds that children would be baptized and thus by this significant rite be separated from heathen ground and brought outwardly on to Christian ground. And this accounts for the absence of any specific instruction. It would have been absolutely superfluous to give instruction where none was needed.

2. A further reason for household baptism has to do with another very important principle, to which reference has already been made, viz., the recognition that there can be no blessings on the ground of the flesh— man in his natural condition. We have already seen that this principle obtained in at least two instances in the history of Israel. It is recorded that when the parents of Samuel would dedicate their child to the Lord, “*They slew a bull-ock, and brought the child to Eli.*” The lesson is, we cannot dedicate our children to God apart from some symbol of death. Baptism is the appointed and appropriate symbol, the symbol of death and burial, which must accompany this act. It is the recognition on the part of the parents that only on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ have they any hope. The child is *buried* in the waters of baptism. The flesh is put out of sight. And all future training should be in accordance with this act.

The other instance is when the whole of Israel, parents as well as children, in order to be in an outward place of privilege and relationship with God, passed through the Red Sea, and were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They had to pass through death in symbol. And the point is, God had one law for parents and children alike. Just, as earlier, He had only one law for Noah and his family. They all passed through the water to be with God on a cleansed earth; and the apostle Peter declares, "the like figure where-unto even baptism doth also now save us;" so when Israel pass out of one scene, where God could have no part with them, into a scene where He would build His sanctuary among them, and where special privileges were to be theirs, He brings them through water, and the Apostle Paul calls this baptism. In neither case were the children omitted. In his use of the "all" he is very precise and particular. "All passed through the sea; and were *all* baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The reference to passing through the sea has no point apart from baptism.

3. Baptism is thus seen to be the initiatory rite to an outward sphere of privilege which God establishes on earth. In the above passage the apostle proceeds to tell us of these baptized Israelites: "*And did all eat the same spiritual meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink.*" The young children ate and drank of these things, and baptism was the door of admission to the sphere where such spiritual fare was provided. Have Christian parents no spiritual fare to give their children? What does the same apostle mean when he directs them to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" (Eph. 6:4.)

4. And this indicates a fourth reason for household baptism, for the very language just quoted implies that the children of Christian parents are regarded as a special class. The very form of the exhortation— "Bring them up in the nurture and ad-

monition of the Lord"— differentiates them from the world outside. Such words could not be addressed to unconverted parents. They can only apply where the Lord's authority is already owned. These children are not said to be converted children, as distinct from the unconverted children of believers. The words are addressed indiscriminately to *all* Christian fathers respecting *all* their children, without respect to age or state. Here, then, we have words entirely inappropriate to unconverted people in general, applied indiscriminately to a certain class, and that class the children of believers. It is clear, then, that such occupy a unique position. They are *not* regarded as the world. They are regarded as in a place "within," where the Lord's authority can be brought to bear upon them. What rite brings them there? for they cannot be brought into an *external* place of privilege apart from an external rite. And the answer is, the same rite as that which brought the children of Israel under the authority of Moses, viz., baptism (1 Cor. 10).

The question is often asked, Cannot the exhortation of Eph. 6:4 be carried out apart from baptism? That may be answered by asking another, What is the *appointed* way? Now there never has been a single instance where God has had a people in relationship with Himself apart from some external rite.

Noah and his family were brought through water; Abraham and his family were circumcised; Israel was brought through the Red Sea. Where in the Word of God is Christianity made an exception to this rule? Have we any right to make an exception when God has made none? In bygone days He gave to His people circumcision. Today He gives us baptism. We are told by some that circumcision might apply to children, but baptism must not. But why? There is no adequate answer, and for the simple reason that Scripture does not furnish one.

A Christian parent baptizes his children for the same reason that an Israelite circumcised his. Both

are of external application and nothing more. Both are associated with an external place of privilege. Both signify the same thing, viz., that there is no hope except in a covenant-keeping God.

Think of a Jew, in the old dispensation, arguing something like this: I am a descendant of Abraham; the privileges that belong to my nation belong to me; in all that my nation inherits I shall share; I look for the promised Messiah, and for all the blessing He will bring; under these circumstances it seems to me circumcision is superfluous and unnecessary, indeed it seems a little carnal! What devout Jew would have argued in that way? Yet it is precisely along these very lines that some Christians argue today with regard to certain aspects of baptism. And this in spite of the fact that the divine principle has never been revoked, that the children of God's children have always been set apart to Him in connection with some external rite. That external rite today must be baptism, for there is no other. And so, as we have seen, the moment the inspired writer is about to deal with Christianity as the new and divinely appointed sphere of blessing on earth, the sphere where the Holy Spirit abides and operates, he begins his unfolding of this truth by a reference to baptism—and moreover, a baptism which included parents and children alike (1 Cor. 10:1-4)

We repeat again: Ever since God had a people outwardly in relationship with Himself, from Noah's day to our own, some outward symbol of death has always been insisted on, whether it took the form of the waters of Noah, or of the Red Sea, or whether it was the rite of circumcision. Where can we find it today except in the rite of baptism?

Two extremes need to be avoided. One, of supposing that an outward observance can of itself confer some inward and spiritual benefit. This is known as baptismal regeneration, and has no warrant from Scripture. The other, of supposing that it can only apply where spiritual life really exists; and that a-

part from this pre-requisite it is superfluous, if not worse. Household baptists seek to avoid both these extremes. They do not believe that new birth is the result of water baptism, or that life, in any sense, is communicated by that means; but they do believe that God puts a difference between the offspring of His own children and those of others who cannot make that claim, and that this difference is to be marked by baptism. God calls such children, even where only one of the parents is a Christian, "holy" (1 Cor. 7:14). Here, then, we have an external sanctification recognized.

It will be seen therefore, from all that has been said, upon what broad and definite principles the practice of household baptism rests. (1) It rests upon the repeated statement in the New Testament that households were baptized. (2) We have seen that this follows in orderly sequence upon a well defined principle and an acknowledged practice running all through the history of Israel, and even dating back beyond, to the time of Noah: viz., the special recognition on the part of God of the households of His people. (3) If this is so, if God has a special regard for such households, then another principle demands recognition, and this also requires and is satisfied by household baptism, viz., the children must be brought to God in connection with some symbol of death. We have seen that this principle had to be acknowledged even in Old Testament times, both in the sign of circumcision, and at the Red Sea. (4) Household Baptism rests, too, upon the very close connection between baptism and circumcision. The apostle links the two together in Col. 2— that is, as to their significance— actually showing that our spiritual circumcision is symbolized in baptism. Now one essential feature of circumcision was its application to children. The natural conclusion would be that baptism would also have its application to children, unless told otherwise. Where are we told otherwise? Such a violent method of procedure as to reverse the custom of 2,000 years demands an explanation. And

yet no explanation is forthcoming. Scripture is absolutely silent on the point. To ask household baptists to produce a command in so many words is neither rational nor fair, seeing that the principle was in force at the time Christianity was introduced. Baptism stands as much an integral part of Christianity as circumcision did of Judaism. It is nothing more than an outward observance, as the other was. It was introduced in connection with the very people who for generations had practiced circumcision. Yet, according to some, while it would have been right to circumcise their children, it would have been wrong to baptize them. Where and when are we told this?

No, the fact is, as we have already intimated, the cause of all the doubt and difficulty on this matter is a misconception as to the nature of baptism, to start with. It has come to be connected with some inward spiritual experience, though, as we have seen, in the case of those whose baptism is put on record in the Scriptures, their spiritual condition was of the most diverse description. In Scripture it stands related to an outward change, and the introduction to an external order of things established by God for the benefit of His people; and an inward spiritual condition sometimes preceded and at other times followed it. This was so as to circumcision, and it applies equally to baptism. In Abraham's case, circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." Yet Isaac was circumcised apart from any faith on his part, for he was only eight days old. In his case it was in view of something. Baptism has just this onward look; it is always towards something and, as we have seen repeatedly in the former part of this pamphlet, not necessarily in connection with something already possessed.

