

A Few Thoughts on

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A FEW THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM

IN looking at the subject of Baptism we are aware that too often it has been a matter of controversy. In the hope that something concerning it can still be said to edification, the following is put before the reader.

First, let us consider a few texts of Scripture involving a difference of translation. In Rom. 6: 3, 4 we read, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized *into* Jesus Christ were baptized *into* His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism *into* death: 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." This is quoted from the Authorized Version, and the Greek word *eis* is translated "into," both here and in the Revised Version as well.

But the *New Translation* and the *Numerical Bible* render *eis* as being "unto," not "into." The task before us is to determine, if possible, which is the proper translation of the word.

It is freely admitted that "into" is one of the various meanings of the preposition *eis*. But neither the Authorized Version nor the Revised is consistent in this use of the word, as we shall now see. In Rom. 5:21 we read: "That as sin hath reigned *unto* death, even so might grace reign through righteousness *unto* eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Here *eis* is translated as "unto" twice in this one verse. Again, in Rom. 6:16 we read, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin *unto* death, or of obedience *unto* righteousness?" Here again the word *eis* is translated "unto."

The question now arises: Inasmuch as *eis* is translated as "unto" in the Authorized Version in the above-quoted texts, why is it not so translated in Rom. 6:3, 4? One reason might be that the doctrine of Rom. 6 possibly requires that "into" be the proper translation of the word *eis*. The only way to decide this is to see how Scripture uses these terms where baptism is in view.

In Matt. 3:11 John the Baptist says: "I indeed baptize you with water *unto* repentance." Again in Acts 19:3 we read: "And he said unto them, *Unto* what then were ye baptized? And they said, *Unto* John's baptism." And finally, in 1 Cor. 10:2, "And were all

baptized *unto* Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The uniformity of the use of the word "unto" as expressing the meaning of the act of baptism in these texts clearly justify the *New Translation* and the *Numerical Bible* in translating *eis* as "unto" in Rom. 6: 3, 4. But better still, this consistent use of "unto" instead of "into" gives us a clearer apprehension of the doctrine of baptism itself.

Fundamentally, water baptism is unto a person, or the teachings of or concerning a person. In John's baptism we have sinners bowing to the judgment of God against themselves. They justify Him by identifying themselves with death, as typified by the waters of Jordan. They thus took sides with God against themselves. Also they became the disciples of John and were under his teaching and leadership (Luke 11: 1).

After the Lord began His public ministry disciples were made and baptized as subjects of the Kingdom of Heaven (John 4: 1, 2). They thus became the responsible followers of the Person and teachings of Christ Himself.

The fundamental doctrine of the Gospels is the unity of the Godhead in three divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When the Lord arose from the dead His final words in Matt. 28: 19, 20 to the eleven disciples were: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptiz-

ing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age). Amen.”

Now it is clear that the Church is not in view here. The teaching (discipling) all nations and water baptism and the earthly teachings of Christ to be made universally known, show that here the kingdom age is in view. It is also clear that the birth of the Church at Pentecost and its truths, subsequently brought to light in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, do not set aside the truths of the kingdom of Heaven in the present dispensation. It is now simply the kingdom of an absent King.

What is called *Christian* baptism is the act by which the professed believer publicly identifies himself with Christ and the doctrine of Christianity that center in Him. He thus becomes a disciple of the kingdom in its present form. This is as far as water baptism can take him. It does not involve the believer's position “in Christ,” as the faulty rendering of Rom. 6:3 by the Authorized Version implies. Only those who are born of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit are “in Christ” and members of the spiritual Body of Christ, the Church.

On the other hand baptism by water generally immediately followed the profession of

faith in Christ, as the Book of Acts abundantly proves (see Acts 16:31-33). We say "profession" because of the fact that in the final analysis it may be found to be temporal and unreal, as illustrated by Acts 8:13, where Simon the sorcerer believed and was baptized, and his unreality and cupidity are exposed in verses 20, 21. So, too, Judas Iscariot was a professed disciple before he was chosen by Christ to be one of the twelve apostles (Luke 6:13), and his real character was only openly revealed at the Last Supper and what followed. And again in John 6:66 we read, "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."

It is fully apparent, then, that there was no such thing as applying for baptism after some period of probation, or appearing before some group of Christians for them to determine their fitness for baptism. It did not depend upon any amount of understanding of Christian doctrine either, but was the first step immediately following their professing to believe the gospel.

To illustrate. A young man wishes to join the Army. He applies at a recruiting station. After an examination for physical fitness he is sworn in and becomes a soldier of the Government. But does he know anything practically of what a soldier is to do? Of course not.

He is put in "the awkward squad" and spends weary hours learning to face right and left and about and innumerable other things, before he fully knows and is able to perform the duties of a soldier. And then, alas, after all this, it is possible that he may be a deserter, or even a traitor to his country, and end his career in disgrace. So also the believer in Jesus begins his discipleship by being baptized unto Christ, and is at once introduced into the school of God to learn the precious truths of Christianity. Only his continuance in the faith and doctrine of Christ is the proof of the reality of his profession.

As to mode and procedure most orthodox believers take full immersion to be the implied Scriptural form. But as to procedure there is some uncertainty in the minds of some. It is true that in the Lord's commission to the eleven apostles in Matt. 28:18, 20 He tells them (ver. 19): "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." But other scriptures show that it was not limited to the apostolic office. In Acts 8:5, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." In verse 12 we read, "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men

and women." Philip also baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch (ver. 38).

Here we learn at least two things which should exercise all Christians. First that it is the privilege of every believer to preach the gospel to others in the name of Christ; then, also it is the believer's privilege to baptize any who believe the message of salvation. The idea that these things belong to gifted and accredited teachers and preachers of the gospel is a mistake. Paul is the sample teacher and preacher of the Church dispensation. In 1 Cor. 1:17 he disavows having any special commission to baptize, as he says, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." But he surely believed in baptism, for he was baptized himself (Acts 9:18) and had baptized a few at Corinth. But apparently he left it in the hands of those who composed the assemblies gathered to the Lord's name. Individual disciples were free to baptize, and to have the oversight in carrying out collectively the affairs of the kingdom of heaven in the Name of Christ.

The kingdom of heaven passes through all dispensations and is linked with the character and doctrines of each one. In the present dispensation disciples are baptized unto Christ and His death. All true believers are also members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

When such are certain of their eternal salvation they are received into the recognized circle of those who gather unto Christ on the ground of the truth of the "One Body." But they are also identified with the kingdom of God and are disciples thereof, and are called upon to maintain its principles and teachings while here on earth.

But alas, there is a large body of what we call Christendom whose profession is only nominal. They fill the ranks of mere profession without life or the knowledge of sins forgiven. They are responsibly connected thus with the kingdom of God in this way but cannot be recognized as members of the Church of God.

In Ephesians 4:4-6 there are three spheres or groups set forth in order. Group 1: "There is one Body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (ver. 4). Here we have a limited, exclusive group of which three things are said: 1, "One Body," composed of believing Jews and Gentiles who are quickened by Divine life. 2, "One Spirit," who baptizes (spiritually) all such believers into one Body (1 Cor. 12:13). 3, "One hope of your calling," the heavenly hope of being "caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

Group 2: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (ver. 5). Here we have three more truths covering the wider sphere of kingdom profes-

sion, both nominal and real. All such own the Lordship of Christ and profess the faith of Christianity and are baptized in water as pledging allegiance to their absent Lord whose Person and work they have thus publicly become identified.

Group 3: "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all." Here again we have three truths in one verse. 1, "One God and Father of all" speaks of God as the Creator of all men from the beginning in Genesis. In Acts 17:28 Paul says to the Athenians, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring." 2, "Who is above all." What a soul-tranquilizing truth is here! He sitteth o'er the water-floods. In spite of all the apparent confusion on earth God is above it all, and holds a firm hand in the affairs of His creatures! 3, "And through all" shows us that He is working in the midst of all that goes on in this world. He "ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Dan. 4:32). He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him and restraineth the remainder (Ps. 76:10). "And in you all," the last clause of this verse, stands by itself as an appendix. It brings home to the hearts of His people that this Almighty One is in all the saints of God on earth (2 Cor. 6:16).

We see here that the saints are linked with three spheres. As a creature of God he is connected with the whole human family. Then he is also a disciple in the kingdom of God. And finally, he is in the inner and most blessed circle of all, the Body of Christ.

Before closing this brief review of this deeply interesting and important subject a few thoughts concerning the place of children of believing parents will surely be in place.

For some time now the popular conception has been that adult or younger persons who definitely know they are saved are the only ones eligible for water baptism. Years ago household baptism was held and taught by some of the most gifted teachers and leaders among God's people. But with many today the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. Some have gone so far as to say that these teachers, many of whom were once clergymen, had carried with them what they call the erroneous doctrine of household baptism when they broke their former ties to come out of the truth of the Church and the practice of scriptural ministry.

This, however, is entirely unfair because "baptismal regeneration of children" was one of the doctrines repudiated by these selfsame teachers. No; the truth is that they believed in household baptism because of the bearing of

certain scriptures which they believed supported it.

For instance: A believing husband and wife have children. They desire to bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." They read of parents who brought children in their arms to Christ. Offsetting the rebuking disciples, He says, "Suffer the *little* children to *come unto Me*, for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10: 14; Matt. 19: 13, 14) But did they come of their own volition? No; they were brought in the arms of the parents. Now inasmuch as identity with Christ by baptism is one of the keys of the kingdom (teaching being the other), this scripture seems to suggest that this is the scriptural way to bring our children to Christ in the present time.

It is seldom found that the children of believers are anything else but believers themselves through early childhood. Is it not logical to assume that they are indeed believers until by some definite act of rejection they take the outside place of unbelievers? In fact, many saints who have the scriptural assurance of sins forgiven have never known themselves to be anything else but believers all their lives.

But some perplexed soul may say: What is advised to be done in view of the contrary teachings on this subject? What we need is not advice but *faith*. Once we have grasped

the truth that water baptism imparts no spiritual status or fitness for identification with the Assembly of God, but is connected only with the kingdom of God in its earthly sphere, all is simple.

If such have faith to include their children with themselves as being disciples of this kingdom there should be no hindrance put in their way to acting upon it. Scripture, at least, puts no limits on a God-given faith.

Application for fellowship with saints gathered to the Lord's name is on a different basis. Such can be scripturally received only on the ground of their knowing themselves to be members of the Body of Christ. They should surely be interviewed, and the knowledge that they are truly Christ's, that they are free from false doctrine and of godly character, be ascertained to the satisfaction of the whole gathering, before reception as acknowledged members of the local assembly. Baptized believers they should be, but this, as said before, is not the *ground* for church-fellowship.

Trusting the reader will be encouraged to read the Scriptures diligently to see if these things are so, we pray that he may be rewarded by a definite conviction as to the truth of the matter.

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