

The Importance of Scriptural Baptism

By Elder Herb Hatfield

Baptism is a very important Bible subject. The word “baptize” occurs nine times in the New Testament and “baptism” twenty times. Jesus Christ demonstrated the importance of a proper baptism by traveling (probably walked) sixty miles from Galilee to the Jordan River to be immersed by John the Baptist, the only man on earth at that time with authority from God to baptize. He further showed the importance of baptism by making it part of His earthly ministry. After His baptism by John, Jesus Christ went forth, preaching and baptizing. The fact that Jesus’ disciples made and baptized more disciples than John the Baptist was an issue that the Pharisees tried to use to provoke jealousy in John the Baptist. (John 4:1)

The importance of baptism is seen in the ministry of the apostles in the Book of Acts. They baptized about three thousand on the Day of Pentecost (Acts.2:41). Its importance can be seen in the ministry of Philip, the evangelist. The importance of baptism can also be seen in the conversion of Cornelius and his baptism by the Apostle Peter. Paul baptized Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailor and his household immediately after their conversion. If water baptism was so important to Jesus Christ, to the apostles and to those first century Christians, then it should be important to every Christian who has a God-given desire in their heart to follow Jesus Christ today.

I. WHAT IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO HAVE SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM?

Baptism must be administered according to the teachings of the Bible if it is to be scriptural baptism. Anything less than this is not true baptism, even though many might call it baptism. Four conditions must be met if we are to have Scriptural baptism.

A. SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM MUST HAVE A SCRIPTURAL SUBJECT – A Regenerated Child of God! Only those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and have made a confession of faith in Christ as their only hope of salvation are scriptural subjects for baptism. Jesus was never lost; therefore He did not need to be saved. He was already the Only Begotten Son of God. The Holy Spirit must regenerate all others before they can be scripturally baptized.

Scriptural baptism is believer’s baptism. According to the instructions of Jesus Christ in Matt.28:19, we are to evangelize by preaching the Gospel and then

baptizing those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, making disciples of them. In Acts 2:41 we read, “then they that gladly received his word were baptized”. In Acts 8:12, 36 & 37, they believed and then they were baptized. In Acts 10:43-44, & 47, they believed, received the Holy Ghost, and then they were baptized. (Unregenerate people do not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit). In Acts 16:30-34 the Philippian jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” They said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” Paul did not tell him to be baptized to be saved! His baptism came after his believing! A person is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and converted when they are brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Only then is anyone qualified to receive scriptural baptism.

B. A SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM MUST HAVE A SCRIPTURAL METHOD – Immersion in water. Pouring and sprinkling cannot be scriptural methods because neither one can be found in the Bible. Immersion in water is the only scriptural method of baptism. Jesus was immersed in water; see Mark 1:9-10 and Matthew 3:13-16. John the Baptist needed “much water” for baptism (John 3:23). Sprinkling requires little water. In Acts 8:26-39, in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian, we are taught that baptism is by immersion. Baptism pictures a burial, (Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12) which sprinkling can not do. All Greek scholars admit that “baptism” or “baptizo”, as it is in the Greek, the language of the New Testament, means to immerse, plunge, or dip. The Greek word for sprinkling is entirely different and is never used in connection with baptism in the New Testament.

C. A SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM MUST HAVE A SCRIPTURAL PURPOSE – Symbolic, it is a picture of certain Bible truths. Baptism does not regenerate or wash away any sins, as many try to teach. Any form of doctrine that makes baptism necessary for eternal life is unscriptural and destroys its scriptural purpose. I will explain more fully the purpose of scriptural baptism later.

D. A SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM MUST HAVE A SCRIPTURAL ADMINISTRATOR – By the authority of a New Testament Baptist Church. Not just anyone can print legal money, nor can just anyone practice medicine as a doctor, neither can just anyone be a lawyer. The laws of man regulate all these activities. Baptism is regulated by the laws of God. If any one of the above conditions is not met, then the baptism is not scriptural, and therefore, is invalid. Without scriptural authority, there is no scriptural baptism. It may be that both the administrator and the candidate for baptism are very sincere and devout, but neither sincerity or devoutness is a substitute for authority from God. Much dispute has centered on the subject of “Who has authority to administer scriptural baptism?” This is unfortunate and is the Devil’s work to discredit the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. A brief study of the New Testament, with an open mind, will clear up the confusion. John the Baptist was the first baptizer, and he got his authority from God (John 1:6). Jesus and all twelve apostles were baptized by

John (Acts 1:21-22). Jesus gave the apostles, who made up the first church (I Cor. 12:28), the authority to baptize. He commissioned that same church to send out authorized ministers to preach the Gospel and baptize converts (Matt. 28:19).

On the day of Pentecost 3,000 people who received the Word were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41). It makes sense that the same church to which those new converts were added was the church that had the authority to baptize them. Philip, an ordained minister authorized by the church at Jerusalem, preached in Samaria and baptized the converts. He got his authority from the Jerusalem church. Peter preached in the house of Cornelius and the whole household believed and received the Holy Ghost. He then baptized them in water by the authority of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 10: 47 and Acts 11:12). Paul baptized his converts during his preaching trips because the Holy Ghost, through the church at Antioch, had called and sent him to the work of evangelism. (Acts 13: 1-4).

When Paul found those disciples at Ephesus whose baptism was unscriptural, he did not hesitate to instruct them correctly and then give them proper baptism. Today, any child of God who may discover that for any reason their baptism is unscriptural should immediately seek to be scripturally baptized.

II. SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM PLEASURES GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GOD THE SON

When John baptized Jesus, God the Holy Spirit showed His approval by coming in the form of a dove and lighting upon Christ. God the Father spoke from heaven only twice during the ministry of Jesus Christ, once on the mountain of transfiguration and then at His baptism by John, when there came a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt.3:13, 16, and 17). When we follow the example of Jesus, we most certainly please the Father and the Holy Spirit. Scriptural baptism is obedience to the scriptures, and obedience is better than burnt offerings and sacrifice (I Sam. 15:22; Acts. 5:29). “Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized.” Acts 2:41.

A. Scriptural baptism is the first act of obedience for the new convert Paul baptized the Philippian jailer the very night he believed. While immediate baptism is not necessary, baptism should not be delayed. Baptism was instituted by God as a means of publicly confessing faith in Christ as Saviour and as a means of identifying with Him before the world. It is the first act of obedience for the new convert. A believer is living in disobedience to God until they are scripturally baptized.

B. Scriptural baptism gives the new believer in Christ a scriptural home. “And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls...” (Acts 2:41).

Regeneration and scriptural baptism qualifies the new convert for membership in a New Testament church where they can be spiritually nurtured. Our Lord said we are to baptize the new converts and then teach them. “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20)

C. Scriptural baptism pleases the Lord because it recognizes His authority. Baptism can only be administered on the authority given by Christ Jesus to His churches. The word for “power” in Matt. 28:18 means “authority”. When Christ gave the Great Commission, He gave it to His “ecclesia”-called out assembly- His assembly and her ministers, not to any individual alone. Scriptural baptism at the hands of a scriptural administrator places a new convert in a scriptural home where they can grow and serve the Lord in obedience to Him.

III. SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM PROCLAIMS THE GOSPEL

The purpose of baptism is not for the forgiveness of sins, as some teach. Indeed, you cannot have scriptural baptism until the person to be baptized has been regenerated and professes faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Redeemer from sin. If the candidate for baptism has not been regenerated when they enter the baptismal waters, they go into the water a dry sinner, and come out of the water a wet sinner. In such a case, scriptural baptism has not taken place and the person is left deceived and confused by false teachers.

Baptism is a picture, type, figure, and symbol of our salvation. A picture or figure is not the same as the real thing. A man does not marry the picture of his bride, but he marries the bride. The picture of the bride is fine, but what man would settle for the picture only. You do not eat the picture of a loaf of bread, but you eat the bread. “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” I Peter 3:21

The above scripture plainly tells us that baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh. It is only a figure, picture, or symbol of that salvation. To contend that the figure or picture is the same as the real thing is foolish indeed. “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, WHO is the FIGURE of HIM that was to come.” (Romans 5:14) This scripture tells us that Adam was a figure of Christ. No one would argue that Adam was Christ. No, he was only a figure, or picture of Christ. Water baptism is the outward testimony of the believer’s inward faith. If water baptism cleanses us from sin, then from what does the blood of Christ cleanse us? See I John 1:7 and Hebrews 9:11, 12, 22, 25 & 26. If the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, how can water baptism do any better? See Heb. 10:4.

A. Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. “Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.” (Col. 2:12) Water baptism is a visible, public and outward testimony of faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as the sole means of salvation. I would hasten to add that, if God-given faith does not exist, then a scriptural baptism can not be administered; an unregenerate person cannot receive scriptural baptism.

B. Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS the death of our old life to sin; the burial therein; and the resurrection to walk in newness of life. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4)

C. Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS our faith in the Triune God. “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (Matt. 28:19) Where there is not a faith in the Holy Trinity, scriptural baptism cannot be administered.

D. Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS our putting on of Christ. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:26-27) Christ Jesus indwells us by the Holy Spirit from the time of regeneration. In baptism, we personally and publicly put on Jesus Christ.

IV. SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM PROTECTS THE LORD’S TRUE CHURCHES

In many ways, scriptural baptism is a shield of protection to the Lord’s true churches.

A. Scriptural Baptism Protects the Lord’s Churches from Doctrinal Errors

1. Scriptural baptism protects the churches from the false doctrine of “baptismal regeneration.” In the 2ND century, some of the churches began to teach that baptism was necessary for salvation. In the 1st century, Paul had dealt with those who taught that you had to be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved. He repudiated that doctrine. Even so, those preachers and churches who were sound in the faith during the 2nd century repudiated baptismal regeneration. However, large numbers continued baptizing for the wrong purpose. This eventually led to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Scriptural baptism protects the churches from the false doctrine of “infant baptism.” Those who were teaching baptismal regeneration (salvation by baptism)

decided that, if baptism were so important, then the sooner it could be performed, the better. This led to infant baptism. At first, the infants were immersed because at that time, immersion was the only mode of baptism used in all the early churches.

3. Scriptural baptism protects the churches from the false method of “sprinkling” for baptism. The churches which believed in “baptismal regeneration and infant baptism” changed the method of baptism from immersion to pouring, and then later to sprinkling. By the 4th century, Constantine had formed the Roman Catholic Church, and in 416 A. D., infant baptism was established by law. The Protestants who teach baptismal regeneration, infant baptism, and sprinkling are merely following the example of the Roman Catholic Church.

The three doctrinal errors mentioned above violate the first three requirements for scriptural baptism. (1) Baptismal regeneration requires sinners to be baptized, while scriptural baptism requires the regenerated to be baptized. (2) Sprinkling requires little water, while scriptural baptism requires “much water.” (John 3:23) (3) Infant baptism requires little infants who are unable to hear and believe to be baptized, but scriptural baptism requires that believers only be baptized.

4. Scriptural baptism protects the churches from the evil of Open Communion

Scriptural baptism is a prerequisite for the scriptural observance of the Lord’s Supper. All who observed the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament had been scripturally baptized and were members of the same church with whom they were observing the Lord’s Supper. Open communion is the next step after we remove the bar of scriptural baptism.

5. Scriptural baptism protects the Lord’s churches from Protestant Denominationalism

Since all Protestant denominations came out of the Roman Catholic Church, it is not surprising that all of them contend for one or more of the above doctrinal errors. The Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Methodists all sprinkle infants, and all believe in some form of baptismal regeneration. All other Protestant denominations are branches either of the Roman Catholic Church, or one of the above Protestant denominations, and/or accept the baptisms of them. Church history will show that Baptists are not Protestants, but have existed separate in every century since the first century. They have existed under different names, such as Christians, Montanists, Donatists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Anabaptists, and Baptists. (A rose by any other name smells the same.) Baptists cannot accept the baptism of religious orders that are wrong on the doctrine of salvation. This is a doctrine that is vital to the Christian faith. Although it is not

generally acknowledged, all the Protestant denominations teach baptismal regeneration, as Dr. Roy Mason shows in his book, "The Church that Jesus Built".

The Episcopal Catechism says: "Baptism is that wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God."

The Presbyterian Confession reads: "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sin..."

The Methodist ritual reads as follows: "Sanctify this water for His holy sacrament and grant that this child, now to be baptized, may receive the fullness of Thy grace, and ever remain in the number of Thy faithful and elect children."

The Methodist articles were based on those of the English Church (Episcopalian)...Concerning the articles of the English Church, to which he belonged, we find John Wesley writing as follows (Sermons, London, 1872, Vol. 2, sermon 45, p. 74): "It is certain our church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again; and it is allowed that the whole office of the baptism of infants proceeds on this supposition."

"The Lutheran view: This is expressed by the founder in the Augsburg Confession as follows: "Concerning baptism, they teach that it is necessary to salvation...and condemn the Anabaptists, who hold ...that infants can be saved without it." (Neander's, HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DOGMAS, Vol. 2, p. 693). (quoted by Roy Mason).

6. Scriptural Baptism Protects the Lord's Churches from Interdenominationalism

While there are many different forms of Interdenominationalism and Non-denominationalism, experience has shown us that none of those groups hold to the scriptural teachings on baptism and the Lord's Supper. All of them will accept people into their membership, regardless of who may have baptized them, as long as the person is satisfied with their baptism. Unfortunately, there are a growing number of so-called Baptist churches that have taken the same position. I believe that such Baptists should take down their sign and call themselves Interdenominational, for that is all they are. When a church is wrong on salvation and/or the ordinances of baptism or the Lord's Supper, it is not a scriptural church, regardless of its name. Many Interdenominational churches will accept into their membership those who have been sprinkled, or in some cases, even those who have received no form of water baptism at all. How sad to see people take this position and yet contend that they believe the Bible.

IF A PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH ACCEPTS ALIEN IMMERSION, THEY ARE HELPING TO PAVE THE WAY FOR THE ECUMENICAL ONE WORLD CHURCH

This is a serious statement, but I am willing to stand by it. Any Baptist church that accepts the baptism of Protestant churches is preparing the way for joining the Ecumenical Church later. It is a matter of record that the first step toward ecumenicalism is the accepting of alien baptism. "If their baptism is valid, then why not join them?" However, Protestant baptism is not valid because Protestant churches do not have scriptural authority, nor do they baptize scriptural candidates for a scriptural purpose.

How can Primitive Baptists fellowship with, cooperate with, or receive baptism from churches that may be Baptist in name, but who receive baptism from every religious order that comes along? Baptism does not hinge upon whether the person is satisfied with it, but the question is, is the Lord satisfied with it? Does it meet the teaching of the Scriptures? There are some Primitive Baptist preachers and Primitive Baptist churches that seem to be sound on baptism, as far as the local congregation is concerned; however, they are not embarrassed to receive members from non-Primitive Baptists churches. Those religious orders send out missionaries through mission boards, have Sunday schools, support Bible schools and other religious auxiliaries. How "can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (I Cor. 5:6)

Lest some misunderstand, I do not doubt that there are some of God's elect among other religious orders. Salvation is of the Lord and by His grace. A person can be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and still be a member of a false religious order. Salvation is of the Lord, but a properly authorized minister must administer baptism. We should seek to help deliver those regenerated persons from the false religious order that they are in and bring them to obedience to the Lord by administering scriptural baptism to them by proper scriptural authority. I believe that authority rests in a scriptural New Testament Baptist Church and I believe that New Testament Primitive Baptist churches are the closest to the New Testament than any other religious order that I know of today.

A Primitive Baptist Church that holds the line on SCRIPTURAL baptism will never be a part of the Ecumenical movement and the growing World Church. Already Catholics and many Protestant denominations are working toward unification and greater cooperation between them. They have united some of their Bible colleges, so that theological students from various denominations are studying in the same school. Steps have already been taken by some denominations to accept the ordinations of ministers from other denominations. A number of denominations have already merged and are considering returning to

their mother church, the Roman Catholic Church, the great Harlot Church of Revelation 17.

Scriptural baptism stands as an impassable barrier and an unbridgeable gap between sound Baptist churches and the ecumenical movement. As long as Primitive Baptist churches do not accept baptisms from the Catholic Church, from Protestant churches and those so-called Baptists churches that accept their baptisms, we will not ecumenicalize with them. If a Primitive Baptist church ever accepts any baptism from any religious order other than a New Testament Primitive Baptist church, that church will have started down the slippery slope of compromise and ecumenicalism that leads to apostasy. They will themselves cease to be a New Testament Primitive Baptist Church.

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