

Believer's Baptism

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Its Mode

Almost endless confusion and controversy have arisen over the proper mode of believer's baptism — whether it should be administered by sprinkling or immersion.

Actually, the word "baptize," derived from the Greek word *bapto*, is a transliteration of the lengthened form *baptizo*, a transliteration being the bringing of a word into another language without translating it. Any reliable Greek-English lexicon clearly defines *baptizo* to mean "to dip" or "immerse." W.E. Vine has significantly remarked:

The Greeks used the word, for instance, of the dyeing of a garment, in which the whole material was plunged in and taken out from the element used, or, again, of a boat which had been wrecked by being submerged and then stranded on the shore. To substitute the words "immerse," "immersion," for "baptize" and "baptism" is a mistake, for immersion is only a part of the process, and a person merely immersed would not remain alive. We need, therefore, the transliterated words, for which no adequate English equivalent existed.¹

Had *baptizo* been translated "dip" or "immerse," at least the general meaning of the word would have been readily understood and the mode of believer's baptism clarified. Why was it not so translated? J.R. Littleproud has answered this question as follows:

Sprinkling had already been introduced in Britain, and had been widely accepted. It is said to have found its way into the Westminster Confession in 1643 by the deciding vote of the chairman, Dr. Lightfoot, after a tie vote of the committee, 24 votes for it, and 24 votes

against it. With so great a public opinion in favor of sprinkling, the 1611 translators passed on the responsibility by transliterating instead of translating by using a Greek word, 'baptize' that meant nothing to English ears, instead of using the word, 'immerse' which would have declared the truth even though it might not have settled the controversy.²

That the mode of immersion, not sprinkling or effusion (pouring), is implied in the Word of God is evident from various recorded examples of baptism. In Matthew 3:16 we read: "Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water." Granted, this was the baptism of John to which the Lord Jesus voluntarily submitted, and not believer's baptism, but it nonetheless serves to illustrate the accepted mode of baptism. Had sprinkling been in vogue it would have been unnecessary for Christ to have entered the Jordan River. Again, in John 3:23, it is recorded that "John was also baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, because there was much water there." If baptism had been by sprinkling there would have been no need to seek a place where there was "much water." Of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch it is recorded: "They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip..." (Acts 8:38-39).

While the reality behind believer's baptism, not the rite itself, is the important thing, immersion best symbolizes its meaning since it portrays the reality of the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Of course, the most important thing is the heart condition of the candidate for baptism, and on this matter William MacDonald has said:

There are thousands of persons who have been immersed in water, but who have not been really baptized. The truly baptized person is the one who has not only gone through the outward ordinance, but whose life shows that the flesh, or old nature, has been put in the place of death. Baptism must be a matter of the heart, as well as an outward profession.³

Its Verbal Formula

The only verbal formula given in connection with believer's baptism, and in effect until the end of the age, is in Matthew 28:19: "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." No formula is found in Acts at all. Some deny that the words of Matthew 28:19-20 have anything to do with this present Church age, but, among other things, it is inconceivable that Peter would have exhorted believers on the day of Pentecost to be baptized if this commission had been set aside, and at that, just a short time after it had been given by Christ.

The problem which arises between the formula of Matthew 28:19 and such words as Acts 8:16, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus," is ably answered by C.F. Hogg:

The preposition used in Matthew 28:19 is *eis*, which always suggests motion toward. There is an ellipsis to be supplied, such as "baptizing them into association with" the Triune Name. The same preposition is used in Acts 8:16; 19:5; in their baptism these persons were publicly

associated with the Name of the Lord Jesus. In Acts 10:48 the preposition used is *en*; the words should be read, not that they were baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, but that in the Name of Jesus Christ Peter commanded that they should be baptized. Here “in the Name” means under the authority of, for this was just the point in dispute with those “of the circumcision,” who accompanied Peter, whether they had the authority of the Lord for baptizing Gentiles who professed faith in Him, unless they became Jewish proselytes as a preliminary. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his friends had settled the question finally. To baptize under the authority of the Lord was to baptize under the authority of the only command He gave, that recorded in Matthew 28:19. To be baptized into association with the Lord Jesus Christ was to be baptized into association with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, Whom He revealed; the word name is in the singular — not names, but name, the one Name of the Triune God. There is a figure of speech by which the part is put for the whole. In Acts 2:42, for example, it is clear that “the breaking of bread” is not to be understood as excluding the drinking of the cup, though that is not specified. So with the baptismal formula: the mention of the Name of the Son alone cannot be taken to exclude that of the Father and the Spirit. Moreover, in none of the places in Acts is “the Name of Jesus Christ,” or “of the Lord Jesus” given as the formula used.⁴

Its Administration

Ecclesiasticism has not only clouded the meaning and mode of believer’s baptism, but its administration as well. The accustomed distinction between clergy and

laity, so prevalent throughout Christendom, is clearly unscriptural, and the idea that only a man who is an ordained minister can baptize is also foreign to the teaching of the New Testament. Any man who is a believer may administer believer's baptism, though surely the one who administers it should be a respected, spiritually-minded Christian.

Its Abuses

Man has a way of coloring and complicating the simple truth of God's Word, sometimes leading to tragic spiritual results. Unfortunately, this is no less true in regard to his corruption of the truth connected with the ordinance of believer's baptism, there being at least two main abuses of it which are practiced to this very hour.

Infant Baptism. There is no Biblical foundation or injunction whatsoever for the baptism (i.e., sprinkling) of infants. Actually, this practice stems from ancient pagan rites, Tertullian having strongly denounced it when it began to come into vogue toward the beginning of the third century. It was not until the fifth century that infant baptism became common practice, being linked with the devilish and damning heresy of baptismal regeneration. As a result, many have been deluded into thinking that because they were baptized as infants they were thus saved, thereby trusting a man-made ceremony instead of placing personal faith in the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Household Baptism. The difference between household baptism and infant baptism lies in the distinction that parents who hold to the former simply signify by baptizing their children that they place them outwardly and provisionally under the authority of God where they

are themselves, believing that in due time He will so work in their souls as to bring them to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Exponents of this practice link it with the Jewish rite of circumcision in the Old Testament, but circumcision does not make a Jew (other Eastern peoples practice it also) any more than water baptism makes a Christian (compare Acts 8:9-25; Romans 2:28-29; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6).

There are examples in the New Testament of entire households being baptized (compare Acts 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 29-34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16 with 16:15), but there is no justification for assuming that those in such households included infants. To “hear the Word,” “believe,” and “rejoice” (compare Acts 16:32-34; 18:8) are the responsible actions of responsible persons, not the actions of mere infants who do not know their right hand from their left.

Some smaller groups of Christians go to the extreme of rejecting believer’s baptism altogether, vehemently maintaining that it has no place in this particular “period” of the church age. Nevertheless baptism is definitely enjoined by the Lord on those who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ (compare Acts 10:45-47), though it is in no wise essential to salvation. Others tend to make baptism the passport into church fellowship and participation in the Lord’s Supper, but the Scriptures plainly teach that it is an ordinance completely independent of admission into the local church. It simply signifies that one has taken a stand as a Christian. Granted, the Word of God evidences a definite order: salvation first, then baptism and fellowship (see Acts 2:41-42), but to make baptism a prerequisite for either personal or local church

fellowship is wrong. An unbaptized believer possesses the same rights, privileges, and spiritual blessings in Christ as the baptized believer. It simply remains for the better taught Christian to show genuine love to all other believers who have not yet seen their responsibility to be baptized, and thus to carry out the will of God to “receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). Still others, though these are few, require a baptized believer to be rebaptized in order to be received into their particular fellowship, but there is no Scriptural foundation whatsoever for this practice any more than it is required for a believer to be saved all over again when he transfers from one local church to another. Once a sinner is saved he is saved forever, and once he is baptized he never needs to be rebaptized. However, it should hardly be necessary to stress the fact that anyone who was sprinkled or immersed before becoming a true believer in Christ needs to be baptized again, his first baptism having had no significance.

1 W.E. Vine, *The Church and the Churches* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Limited, n.d.), p. 70.

2 J.R. Littleproud, *The Christian Assembly* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Gospel Folio Press, n.d.), sp. 105.

3 William MacDonald, *Christ Loved the Church* (Oak Park, Ill.: Midwest Christian Publishers, 1956), p. 67.

4 C.F. Hogg, *What Saith the Scriptures?* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1947), p. 147.

Part 1

The Lord Jesus Christ instituted only two ordinances for His Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Having perverted these two, the Roman Catholic Church has added five more ordinances, or what they refer to as "sacraments," but with no Scriptural authority or foundation for them. They are confirmation, penance, extreme unction, marriage, and holy orders. Marriage is certainly recognized and observed by true Christians, but it goes all the way back to Genesis 2:24 as part of God's creation order and is not something which was specifically instituted in connection with the Church.

It is upon the ordinance of baptism that we presently focus our attention. Its institution is in the Gospels (Matthew 28:19); its practice is in (Acts 10:47-48); and its explanation is in the Epistles (Romans 6:1-10).

In our consideration and development of this important subject of baptism we want to observe first:

Its Distinctions

There are three main forms of baptism in the New Testament.

John's Baptism. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Israel's Messiah, the coming King, the Lord Jesus Christ, from whose shed blood alone is "the remission of sins." As the herald of the coming King (Malachi 3:1; Matthew 11:10), John called upon the nation Israel to repent and to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8). Those who responded to his preaching came to him and were baptized, thereby confessing their sins and

separating themselves from the ungodly apostate nation (Mark 1:4-5).

The Lord Jesus Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan River, not because He needed to repent — for He was the sinless Son of God — but in order to do at least four significant things: (1) to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15), (2) to be made known to all Israel, (3) to identify Himself with the believing remnant of the nation, and (4) to figuratively set forth His death, burial, and resurrection (Luke 12:50).

Spirit Baptism. This baptism is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit whereby all who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are forever incorporated into the one Body of Christ (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; John 1:33; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Spirit baptism is never described in the New Testament as an experience subsequent to the new birth, but always to describe an experience of the Holy Spirit which occurs in the initiation of a relationship. Just as each individual believer is both indwelt (Romans 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and sealed by the Spirit of God (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30) at the moment of the new birth, so also is he baptized into the one Body of Christ. However, there may be a repeated “filling” of the Spirit in the believer’s experience (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52; Ephesians 5:18), and this is what many confuse with a false but so-called “second blessing” or “second baptism” of the Holy Spirit.

Some Bible students limit Spirit baptism to what happened on the day of Pentecost, and to the believers being united with the eternal significance of that event at the moment of salvation.

The baptism with fire, spoken of in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, has nothing to do with Pentecost or with the individual experience of the believer, but clearly points to a future judgment (see Matthew 13:42, 50; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Believer's Baptism. This baptism, also referred to as water or Christian baptism, is a type of the believer's identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is an outward symbol of an inward reality.

That these three baptisms — John's baptism, Spirit baptism, and believer's baptism — are different, and not to be confused, is clear by a comparison of the various Scriptures involved (e.g., Matthew 3:15; Acts 19:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Also, the idea that believer's baptism somehow pictures Spirit baptism is wholly unfounded since the former is a type of death, while the latter has to do with incorporation into the Body of Christ.

Its Scriptural Authority

The Lord Jesus Christ gave a definite command in connection with His institution of believer's baptism, the classic passage of Matthew 28:19-20 being by far the best known and most frequently quoted record of the Lord's great commission, or missionary Magna Charta, to His own: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing 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 alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Another Spirit-inspired record of Christ's great commission is furnished by John Mark in the Gospel account bearing his name: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). Some Bible scholars, however, question the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 (see C.I. Scofield's note, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1069).

Those who contend that Christ's commission is not for this present Church age still must reckon with the accounts of Luke 24:46-53 and Acts 1:6-11, coupled with the accounts of Luke 24:46-53 and Acts 1:6-11, coupled with the example and practice of the early church (e.g., Acts 2:41; 8:12, 38; 10:44-48; 16:15, 31-33; 18:8).

Its Subjects

It should be quite obvious that true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are the sole subjects for believer's baptism. Any thought of making disciples "by" baptizing them is to force the meaning of Matthew 28:19 and as a result comes into conflict with other Scriptures. For instance, on the day of Pentecost only those who received the Word of God through Peter's preaching were baptized (Acts 2:41). Again, when Philip experienced so much blessing through the preaching of the gospel at Samaria, believers alone were baptized (Acts 8:12). Furthermore, it was not until the Ethiopian eunuch openly confessed that he had truly believed on Christ that Philip baptized him (Acts 8:36-38). Still other examples are found in connection with the events which took place in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48), at Philippi in regard to the Philippian jailor and his household (Acts

16:32-33), and at Corinth (Acts 18:8). In every instance only those who believed were baptized.

The fact that households were baptized (e.g., Acts 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16) leaves no room whatsoever to presume that some were baptized who had not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they were children or older.

Believer's baptism, then, is limited to believers, or disciples, only.

Its Meaning

The meaning of believer's baptism is summed up in the words of Romans 6:1-10, verses 3 and 4 giving us the heart of the matter: "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 up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (see also Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:12; 3:1).

Believer's baptism is not only a public declaration of the Christian's faith in and identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, but it is also the acknowledgement that the old Adam nature—with all its fleshly vices—has been crucified, and that the believer is living a new life to the glory of God (Romans 6:4, 6).

Water is a picture of judgment and death (see Genesis 7:17-24), and when Christ died He went under the waters of judgment and death to put away our sins (see Psalm 42:7). Now, with these things in mind, the highlights of Paul's argument in Romans 6:1-10, relative to water baptism, may be summed up as follows:

1. When we were baptized into Jesus Christ we were baptized into His death (the literal translation of verse 3 implies that all the Roman believers had been baptized without exception—believers either submitted to water baptism or else were not considered to be in Christ). Or are you ignorant of this great truth (verse 3)?

2. Baptism is a symbol or picture of the great spiritual truth that when Christ died, we died; when He was buried, we were buried; when He was raised, we were raised (verses 4-5).

3. Our old Adam nature has been crucified with Christ; the sin question has been dealt with and forever settled; we are dead to sin (verses 6-7).

4. Since Christ died unto sin forever, something that will never be repeated, and His life is devoted to God; so we in Christ are forever dead to sin and our life a life devoted to God (verses 8-10).

Thus it may be said that when we are baptized we publicly identify ourselves with Christ in His death, acknowledging that we have died. In effect the believer says, "I have died, bury me." He is then buried in a watery grave, but not to remain there, for he is raised to walk in newness of life, no longer to serve sin and please self but to yield himself to God and to serve Him.

Briefly, then, this is the meaning of our spiritual and judicial baptism into Christ of which believer's baptism is the figure, believer's baptism being a public act of obedience in fulfillment of our Lord's revealed will, signifying the end of the old life and the beginning of the new life in Him.

Of believer's baptism, Drs. Sanday and Headlam have significantly said: "Baptism expresses symbolically a series of facts... Immersion— Death; Submersion — Burial (the ratification of death); Emergence — Resurrection."

Since water is not actually mentioned in Romans 6 and other related Scriptures (e.g., Galatians 3:27: Colossians 2:12), there may be those who conscientiously question whether water baptism is included at all in the teaching of these passages. In answer to just such an inquiry, the remarks of H. Lacey are helpful:

There has been some material difference of judgment on the nature of baptism to which reference is made in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. Some maintain a spiritual baptism to the exclusion of water baptism. Others assert water baptism to the exclusion of a spiritual sense. We shall be as ill-advised as the two knights in the following legend if we assert either negative. These two were approaching on either side of a hill a shield suspended at its summit. One asserted that the shield was made of gold and the other that it was of silver. A duel followed and unhorsed, injured, and prone after their controversy and conflict, looking up at that shield, each from the side opposite to his first approach, discovered the measure of his error and the degree of his accuracy, for the one side was silver and the other gold. The true gold of the antecedent spiritual fact of the death of the believer in the death of Christ, and also the counterpart silver of the mirror of this truth in a physical immersion in water constitute the matter of these passages.

If we assert a water baptism to the exclusion of a spiritual one, we shall err as much as if we assert a spiritual one to the exclusion of a water baptism, and, sidetracked from the balanced practical teaching involved in the inclusion of both, the worse of our folly, we may repent at length as did the knights of old.¹

1 H. Lacey, "Baptism," *The Church: A Symposium*. ed. J. B. Watson (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1949), pp. 60-61.

Part 2

Some Problem Passages

There are several New Testament passages which have been misunderstood and, as a result, misapplied in regard to believer's baptism.

Mark 16:16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

There are those who maintain that water baptism is essential to salvation, and this is one of several "key" texts to which appeal is made. However, two things should be kept in mind regarding this verse: (1) the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 is questionable, so caution should be exercised in seeking to use this statement as a proof-text, and (2) the only pronouncement of condemnation at the end of the verse is upon those who do not believe, for the words "and is not baptized" do not follow "believeth not." Furthermore, it should be understood that water baptism is included here simply as the normal outward and public sign accompanying true belief in Christ.

John 3:5. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

It is probably safe to conclude that the most widely accepted explanation of this verse among conservative Bible scholars takes "water" here as a symbol of the Word of God (compare Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 5: 25-26; Titus 3:5), which is, of course, the instrument of the new birth (compare James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23), the Spirit of God being the Agent of the new birth. This is certainly a

possible and plausible answer to the problem posed by this text, but there is another school of thought worthy of consideration.

The Lord Jesus Christ was speaking to Nicodemus about the new birth, and He used the words “born of water and of the Spirit” to explain the previous phrase “born again” in verse 3. In the Authorized King James Version of the Scriptures there are six words in the phrase of verse 5, while in the Greek text there are but four, which literally read: “of water and spirit” (small “s”). At first Nicodemus thought the Lord Jesus was referring to the natural (verse 4), but Christ’s words in verse 5 clearly indicated to this inquiring Pharisee that He was referring to a washing of a spirit kind. In other words, Christ was speaking of a spiritual cleansing, something Nicodemus should have known about from Ezekiel 36:24-27 and 37:1-14. The new birth is indeed a spiritual cleansing (see Titus 3:5). From the standpoint of Greek grammar this phrase in John 3:5 affords an example of what is called hendiadys, meaning “one in two,” that is, one thought expressed by two figures. Thus “water” and “spirit” express one thought — namely, a spiritual cleansing, and this, brought about only by being “born again.”

The words of John 3:5 are used by some to try to substantiate the erroneous idea of baptismal regeneration, but the word “baptize” is nowhere found in the context of this classic conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, plus the fact that baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with the subject matter of the passage. In fact, believer’s baptism did not even exist at that time.

Acts 2:38. "Then Peter said unto them, 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."

This is a favourite text, along with Mark 16:16 and Acts 22:16, of those who contend that water baptism is essential to salvation. Yet, while vigorously seeking to gain their point, such adherents conveniently ignore the many texts which clearly assert that salvation is by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if water baptism is essential to salvation how could the dying malefactor on the cross have been saved (Luke 23:39-43), and why did Paul and Silas answer the Philippian jailor as they did (Acts 16:31)? Also, what about Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:14?

To apply the words of Acts 2:38 and 22:16 to Gentiles is a serious error. On both occasions these statements were directed exclusively to Jews (see 2:22, 36; 22:1), the words of Acts 2:38 having been spoken on the day of Pentecost and thus at the beginning of a transitional period in the church's history (see also 3:12; 4:10; 5:30-31; 7:2, 51). These Jews were directly charged with the crucifixion of Messiah (see 2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52), while the pattern of approach to the Gentiles is found in Acts 10:34-43 and has not changed from that time on down to the present moment, the Gentiles having been charged only indirectly with Christ's crucifixion (note "they" in 10:39).

Regarding Peter's words in Acts 2:38, it is well to remember that water baptism signifies a change of association. Because it was one of the acts a Jewish proselyte had to undergo, plus the background of John

the Baptist's ministry, baptism was well-known to the Jews of that day. However, this was not just any sort of baptism which Peter commanded, but baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, involving a complete break with Judaism and an association with the Lord Jesus Christ and His followers. Even today it is not a Jew's profession of Christianity nor his acceptance of the New Testament nor his attendance at Christian services, but his submission to Christian baptism that severs his tie with the Jewish community and marks him off as a Christian. This explains the stress placed here upon the ordinance of water baptism.

One day, when in the home of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. of Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, I asked him what his answer is to the problem of Acts 2:38. I am indebted to him for the following considerations, plus the concluding illustration, which clarify the meaning of this problematical text:

1. Read Acts 10:43.
2. Peter is again speaking in Acts 10:43.
3. In Acts 10:43 Peter mentions only believing, thus revealing that believing, not baptism, is the key thing in Acts 2:38.
4. The context which follows Acts 10:43 is the clincher.

Actually, in the matter of salvation, baptism is a non-essential. It is like getting your hat to get in your car to go to town. Getting your hat is a non-essential.

to be continued

Part 3

1 Corinthians 1:13-17. "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

The church at Corinth was marked and marred by party spirit and this is why Paul wrote as he did here. It is not that he thought believer's baptism was unimportant, but that he had purposely and legitimately refrained from baptizing any of the Corinthian converts, with the exception of those named, lest some should claim a superior standing over others by saying: "I was baptized in the name of Paul!" The apostle's specific commission from the Lord was to preach the gospel, not to baptize converts. It is apparent that he generally left the baptizing of new converts to local brethren, an example that might well be followed in many instances both at home and abroad.

1 Corinthians 15:29. "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?"

All that is explicit and implicit on the doctrine of the resurrection is disclosed in this great chapter, verse 29 serving as one of Paul's closing arguments concerning this vital subject. There are two main views as to the meaning of this text: (1) that if there is no resurrection,

then baptism is in vain, a ceremony only in the interests of those now spiritually dead and soon to be physically dead, or, and this is the most commonly accepted view, (2) that many believers were persecuted and martyred soon after conversion, but in spite of this, there were always new converts who boldly stepped forward to be baptized and thus fill up the ranks of those who had been put to death for the sake of Christ.

There is nothing in the history of the church to substantiate the idea that there was some sort of ceremony whereby believers were baptized on behalf of loved ones or friends who had died before they were able to be baptized.

1 Peter 3:21. "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."

Correctly understood, this verse is not a proof-text in support of baptismal regeneration. Linking his thought with the previous context, Peter makes a typical comparison of Noah's ark and the flood with water baptism. The ark is a type of Christ. As the flood fell upon the ark, so all the waves and billows of divine judgment against sin fell upon Christ when He died on the cross as our sinless substitute (1 Peter 2:22-24). By the very waves of wrath, judgment, and death, the ark was borne to a new world, and likewise all who were in it. Water baptism is the figure of death and resurrection, of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in both. The believer's sins have been forever put away, he is dead to sins (1 Peter 2:24). All has been buried out of sight and he has been raised up in Christ to a new life, to a new

world, and to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Peter is careful to state the fact that water baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh, either literally or spiritually. Rather, it expresses “the answer,” or better translated, “the demand of a good conscience toward God.” The believer’s good conscience toward God is made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this, symbolized by his emergence from the waters of baptism. Briefly commenting on 1 Peter 3:21, W. Wilcox has said of the believer:

Baptized as one confessedly dead, he does not remain as one dead, with no consciousness of God, but, through the resurrection of our Lord, he enters into the risen life with a full consciousness of God, and whatever questionings and testings of the inner life there may be, he will ever remember that, as Christ died and rose, so he has died and risen again as symbolized in his baptism.¹

Having considered something of the distinctions, Scriptural authority, subjects, meaning, mode, verbal formula, administration, abuses, and problem passages relative to believer’s baptism, the conclusion expressed by W.E. Vine is readily arrived at and confirmed: “An unbaptized believer is not contemplated in the New Testament. It could not be otherwise in view of the Lord’s command.”²

Are you a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, have you obeyed His command to be baptized?

The last glimpse we have of the Ethiopian eunuch after he was baptized is that “He went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). This indeed is the experience of

those who, as true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, intelligently obey His command to be baptized.

Making an acrostic out of the word baptism, it may be said to signify:

Belief on Christ

Avowal of Christ

Possession by Christ

Testimony about Christ

Identification with Christ

Submission to Christ

Mercy through Christ

One of God's saints of a past generation has anonymously written:

Is it Thy will that I should be

Buried, in symbol, Lord, with Thee;

Owning Thee by this solemn sign,

Telling the world that I am Thine?

Gladly I yield obedience now;

In all things to Thy will I'd bow;

I'll follow where my Saviour led,

And humbly in His footsteps tread.

This emblematic, wat'ry grave

Shows forth His love — who came to save;

And as I enter it, I see

The price my Saviour paid for me.

Forth from Thy burial, Lord, I come,
For Thou halt triumphed o'er the tomb;
Thy resurrection life I share —
My portion is no longer here.
Oh, may I count myself to be
Dead to the sins that wounded Thee,
Dead to the pleasures of this earth,
Unworthy of my heav'nly birth.
Lord Jesus, when I gaze on Thee,
And all Thy radiant glory see,
That joy will far exceed the shame
I bear on earth for Thy loved name.

1 W. Wilcox, "The Resurrection of Christ," *The Faith: A Symposium*, ed. Fredk. A. Tatford (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1952), p. 93.

2 Vine, *op. cit.*, p. 72.