

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

05-81

Dear Reader,

Maybe I've lost my mind in attempting to tackle the subject of the next two issues, yet I believe one cannot close out a study of assembly truth without seeking the Lord's mind about the important truth of baptism, since being baptized in a certain way under certain conditions is a "test of fellowship" among many Christians. Indeed, if you ask Christians what are the ordinances of the Church, many likely will answer, "baptism and the communion service," the breaking of bread. We'll see whether they're right.

To say this subject is controversial is to greatly understate the reality. I have tried to write on it twice before in 20 years or so, and each time it has stirred up a hornet's nest, and believe me, that wasn't my intention. I wanted to shed light, not create heat! If I believed as do most "Baptists," there probably wouldn't have been too much argument, but I don't see their position in its totality from Scripture, although there certainly are scriptural elements in what they teach and practice. I've prayed and prayed about closing the *Assembly Messenger* with this subject, and believe I have been led (I trust) to do so, not being too dogmatic in my statements, but seeking to turn you to Scripture so if you have an argument, it won't be with me, but with God.

This will be a two-part series, but in one envelope. I ask you to prayerfully and carefully read both parts and read the scriptures referenced from an accurate translation before making a strong judgment on this article. I know, to many of you, this will be a new "take" on the subject, and none of us like to have our cherished beliefs challenged. We just *assume* the other person is wrong!

## Too Many Names

There are three major "baptisms" mentioned in Scripture. The first is John's baptism "unto repentance" in the Jordan River and we don't want to spend much time discussing it. The next is the baptism of/with/by/in the power of the Holy Spirit: "In the power of [by] one Spirit we have all be baptized into one body" (1 Cor.12:13, JND). The Lord is the baptizer here (Mt.3:11; Mk.1:8; Lk.3:16; Jn.1:33). We don't want to spend much time on this either. The third is so-called "Christian" baptism—not a scriptural term. By it we mean that it was introduced by Christ in Matthew 28 just before going back to heaven and applies during this dispensation of grace—during the Christian era. We don't know about future dispensations.

The trouble begins when we start applying man-made terms and then line ourselves up behind those terms. Do

you believe in "*baptismal regeneration*" (eternally saved through baptism by a priest or reverend), by sprinkling water on the person being baptized, as does the Roman Catholic denomination and other denominations too? Since it is the way out of eternal damnation (they think), one can see why the baptism at an early age of all infants is urged by the "church." People might also call this "*baby baptism*" or "*infant baptism*." It supposedly also joins the person (of any age) to the "church." We will state dogmatically here that one is saved *eternally* only by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! It is the *Holy Spirit's* baptism, not of some man, that joins the newly-saved believer to the true Church, the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:13). Water baptism has nothing to do with either eternal salvation or being joined to any church. So we will not speak much more of this very false view of baptism.

Or do you believe in "*believers' baptism*"—the baptism of those who publicly confess Christ as their Savior, by immersion only? They believe water baptism to be the public testimony that the baptized person has believed in Christ as Savior. Thus they are very careful only to baptize those who publicly acknowledge they are saved. This is the solid and often militant belief of most in the "Baptist" denomination and most in evangelical Christianity. With many, any challenge to this view stirs up enmity. Does Scripture support this view?

Or do you believe in "*household baptism*" where the children of *believing parents* may be baptized because several "households" were baptized in the New Testament? We'll briefly speak of baptized households near the end of the second *Messenger* article.

*The trouble is that none of these are scriptural terms: Scripture only speaks of (water) baptism! Someone was asked whether he was a "believers' baptist." He said "No." "Then you must be a 'household baptist,'" the inquirer asked. Again the answer was "No." "Then what do you believe in"?* "In *baptism*," was the reply. Can we accept for ourselves *that* very scriptural answer as we read these two articles?

## WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism is an important New Testament teaching, being mentioned about 70 times. But the Bible nowhere makes *details* of baptism a matter to divide Christians, something we need to carefully remember! Therefore, differences of opinion in the details, although unfortunate,

should not lessen our love for each other or hinder our fellowship together. Let's now seek to find what God's Word says as to baptism. All quotes will be from the very accurate J.N.Darby translation so translation-accuracy won't become a point of argument.

### **Baptism is not an Old Testament Doctrine; First Connected with John the Baptist**

Baptism is not mentioned as such in the Old Testament. It is first found in connection with John the Baptist. Although John addressed those who came to him as "offspring of vipers" (Lk.3:7), he, after telling them what they should do, baptized them all (v.21). They were baptized in Jordan, the river of death, as owning their need for remission of sins, not necessarily as yet having received it. They were baptized *unto* John: they became *his* disciples. John's baptism is mentioned in Matthew 3:5-6, 11-16; Mark 1:4-5, 8-9; Luke 3:3,7,16,21, 7:29-30; John 1:25,33, 3:22-26, 4:1-2 and Acts 13:24.

Many translations, when speaking of baptism, say "into John," "into death," into Christ," etc. While the Greek possibly *could* support such a translation, I think we can clearly see that "unto" is the better translation as in the JND. Baptism has something or someone in view.

### **John's Baptism was not Christian Baptism**

Although we can learn some general facts about baptism from John's baptism, it should not be confused with *Christian* baptism—that baptism which after the Lord was risen, glorified, and the Holy Spirit sent down on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Acts 19:2-6 shows how different the two baptisms are: the baptized disciples of John were *rebaptized* to the name of the Lord Jesus, thus becoming *His* disciples. Paul asked John's disciples, "To what then were you baptized? And they said, to the baptism of John. And Paul said, John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who was coming after him, that is, on Jesus. And when they heard that, they were baptized *to the name of the Lord Jesus*. And Paul, having laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them." Note in passing that they were baptized *before* receiving the Holy Spirit.

### **Christian Baptism Established: Matthew 28**

Would you agree that it is a principle of Bible study that the first instance of any Bible doctrine gives important clues as to its meaning and use throughout Scripture, although there generally is much more detail given later? The first mention of "Christian" baptism came directly from the Lord shortly before His ascension as He spoke to the eleven and gave them the so-called *great commission*. Matthew is universally recognized as the Gospel of the

kingdom (or, King), and in chapter 28:18-20 we see the King seeking through His own, additional subjects for His kingdom while He is away on a long journey into a far country (Mt.25:14; Mk.13:34)—in heaven.

The Lord, the King, said, "All power has been given Me in heaven and upon earth. Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, *baptizing* them to the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you." The ones making the disciples were to baptize those who claimed to have become disciples of the King.

Note that we hear nothing of the Church. What we have here is a kingdom matter, what has been coined as "Christendom"—Christ's kingdom. Would you agree that one can be in the kingdom without being saved? How about those people mentioned in Matthew 7:21-23? They certainly had professed the Lord, but He *never* knew them: they weren't saved people! Could the Lord's servants do more than "make disciples"? Only the *Lord* knows for sure those who are His (2 Tim.2:19), for He alone saves anyone! Note too that the KJV is not accurate in translating Matthew 28:18-20. JND, FWG, NKJV, NASB and NIV all translate it correctly as above. Don't let your doctrine be colored by a translation error!

Here, the Lord's disciples were to use the *keys* He had put into man's hands for admission into that kingdom (Mt.16:19). The nations were to be *discipled*—made learners—by the keys of *baptism* (for entrance into the kingdom) and *teaching* (to learn about their professed Sovereign). Baptism marked off the baptized-ones in a world that rejects Christ and His Word, as ones who had become *outwardly identified with their King*. Indeed, man's work can go no further than baptism and preaching, for, again, only God can actually save.

Matthew 7:21-23 shows that many are *outwardly* identified with Christ to the point of calling Him "Lord, Lord" and even preaching in His name (like Judas), but without ever truly being saved. The people described in John 6:24-25, 28, 34 gave the *appearance* of true believers, but verses 27 and 66 show that it was only profession on their part. In John 8:30 we read that some *believed*. But verses 31-46 show the belief to be only an intellectual belief, not a heart belief. Therefore, one does not have to "believe in his heart" (Rom.10:9-10) to be a *disciple* of the Lord, as Judas proved, although it is certainly the Lord's desire that such disciples be truly saved and thus become "*disciples indeed*" (Jn.8:30-31).

### **Professed Christianity; the Kingdom (Christendom) Connected with Baptism**

The whole idea of an intermediate (although outward-only) position between man without any direct acknowledgment of Christ and man with true faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, is foreign to many. The Bible speaks of this sphere in great detail in Matthew 13 and elsewhere. This sphere contains good and evil, but *outwardly* all is subject to the King. At present, the King is absent: when in the future He actually reigns and we with Him (Rev.20:4-6) during the so-called Millennium, there will still be a mixture of true believers and false professors. Then, righteousness will *reign*; in the eternal state, righteousness will  *dwell* (2 Pet.3:13), for only believers will be in the new heavens and new earth.

In Ephesians 4:4-6 we see three concentric circles. We who are saved are in all three by virtue of being in the inner one (v.4) which shows *reality*. There we have *one body* which is the Assembly, *one Spirit* by whom we are joined to the Assembly (1 Cor.12:13), and *one hope*, often thought of as the hope of the Assembly to be with Christ, our hope (1 Tim.1:1), but which Bob Costen believes to be both Jew and Gentile having a heavenly calling.

The next and larger circle is seen in verse 5 and it pictures *profession*, the kingdom. There we see "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*" The Lord and the Bible, the faith of Christianity, are owned at least in name. *Water baptism is connected with this sphere of profession.* The outer circle is the sphere of creation (v.6): all belong to that. Therefore, we see that, just as the baptism of the Holy Spirit (that baptism which the *Lord* performs) is God's appointed and only entrance into the Assembly, the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:13); water baptism is God's appointed means of introduction into the sphere of profession, the kingdom. Water baptism is thus a *kingdom* ordinance. Can you find any other verse that makes it more? Please search!

Another thing seen in the verses in Matthew 28 is that the ones who made the disciples, also baptized them. It is *their* responsibility: no one else needs to be consulted. There is no need for a crowd, although nothing wrong with it either. This is not to say that someone else can't do the actual baptizing, but the point is, there is no "official" baptizer.

### **"He who Believes and is Baptized Shall Be Saved" (Mk.16:16)**

We have one other statement of the risen Lord as to so-called Christian baptism. It was spoken at the same time as Matthew 28:18-20 and really is an addition to that portion which we have already studied. The Lord said, "He who believes and is baptized *shall be saved*, and he who disbelieves shall be condemned" (Mk.16:16). If soul-salvation is in view in this verse, then an outward ceremony that might not be possible in some circumstances, could control a person's going to heaven or hell, even if he believed in the

Lord with all his heart. So, does a person have to be baptized to go to heaven? Or is there some other explanation? Ephesians 2:8-9 and a multitude of other verses clearly show that baptism or any other work of man cannot be connected with soul-salvation. It is clearly stated, "not of works." So, at least as far as baptism is concerned, some other *salvation* must be in view.

Once we connect Mark 16:16 with the portion we have studied in Matthew 28, we see it has to do with *profession*, with the kingdom. True belief brings eternal salvation before God; baptism brings external salvation before men. Simon (Acts 8:12-13, 18-23) believed and was baptized, but his life soon showed there was no reality in his belief. He was only selfishly interested in what Christianity could get him. Did Peter and others make a mistake? That's what is sometimes taught. But, in fact, they did not. They did *exactly* what the Lord in Matthew 28 told them to do!

### **How Baptism Saves (1 Pet.3:20-22)**

Acts 2:38 speaks of baptism being connected with "remission of sins" and verse 40 connects baptism with being "saved from this perverse generation." Does this mean we go to heaven because of baptism? Absolutely not! 1 Peter 3:20-22 well explains for us the significance of baptism and how it *saves*. As we read these verses, think of how Noah and his family were saved by water. When we answer this we will understand how baptism saves us. These verses say, "... when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, into which few, that is, eight souls were *saved through water*: which figure also now *saves you*, even baptism, not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the demand as before God of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God, gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him."

Both the ark and the water saved Noah, but in different ways, illustrating for us the difference between salvation by faith and salvation by baptism. The ark, a type of Christ, saved Noah's *life* because he had the faith to get in it (Heb.11:7-8). On the other hand, the water gave Noah a *change of ground or position* by destroying the old, corrupt world not subject to God and under God's wrath, and transporting him to a cleansed world. Likewise, the waters of baptism *externally* sever us from the old, sinful world and link us outwardly with the new—that sphere which is under the authority of Christ. So if we are true to our baptism, it will save us from a perverse generation.

So, are we not correct in saying one of the primary thoughts in baptism is an *outward* change of position—once going my own way, now professing to go Christ's way, owning Him as Lord and King of my life? In other words, I *outwardly* become part of Christ's kingdom over

which He has authority. Neither the profession nor the baptism makes me an eternally saved person. If the profession is real and I have truly taken the Lord Jesus as my Savior, then I'm eternally saved, with or without water baptism. If the profession is not real, no baptism with water will gain me anything eternally!

There are other verses that speak about baptism saving. Paul had been saved as far as his soul was concerned on the Damascus road (Acts 22:10, 13-15). But Paul was everywhere recognized as a persecutor of the Assembly of God. Something beyond his soul's salvation was required, and that *hastily*. Ananias said to Paul, "Now why lingerest thou? Arise and get baptized and *have your sins washed away*, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). This verse shows that there is an *external* washing away of sins, and it occurs in baptism. Furthermore, God makes it a matter of haste.

So is not another thought of baptism an *external* salvation, an *external* washing away of sins, an *external* remission of sins before man? By taking Christian ground, I am "saved" from this perverse generation!

With this background, let's look again for a moment at Mark 16:16. If a disciple was truly saved when he heard the gospel, then the *belief* was with the heart and he would never be condemned. But baptism was still necessary for outward salvation before men, that *outward* entering into the sphere where Christ's authority and supremacy was owned. If the belief was only intellectual, like Simon, and baptism occurred, there would still be that outward salvation: he accepted clean ground, as it were. However, since there was not true belief, no inward change would take place, although as the Word was brought to bear on the conscience, we would trust that God would bring salvation. Note that there always has to be some kind of *belief* or the person wouldn't submit to baptism. If there was absolutely no acceptance of the message preached, neither internal nor external salvation would occur and the person would clearly before God and man remain a rejecter of the gospel of Jesus Christ—a heathen, atheist, Buddhist, Muslim, etc.

### **First Instance of Christian Baptism**

Now let's look at the first instance of *Christian* baptism. We have seen the risen Lord's directions in Matthew 28 and Mark 16. This was put into practice in Acts 2, a short time after the Lord had given His directions. Peter, indwelt by the Holy Spirit as the Assembly was formed on that day of Pentecost, gave a powerful sermon (vv.14-36), preaching Christ. The response of many of those who heard Peter follows: "Having heard it, they were pricked in their heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, What shall we do, brethren? And Peter said to them, Repent and *be baptized*, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for

to you is the promise and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God may call. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation. Those then who had accepted his word were baptized and there were added in that day about 3000 souls" (vv.37-41).

Peter told the whole crowd to repent and be baptized. Note that there was no test of reality as to the repentance. The baptism came, of course, after the reception of Peter's words: none were *forced* to be baptized. The baptism was for (in view of) remission of sins. If the repentance was real and brought acceptance of Christ as Savior, there would be *inward* (true) remission of sins; otherwise the baptism would only bring *external* remission (or salvation, if you wish). The baptism was to be done in the name of Jesus Christ—that One who less than two months before had been crucified by the Jews, but rose again. Scripture assumes reality: where it was so, there would be the giving of the Holy Spirit. Note in this case that the Holy Spirit came *after* baptism.

There was to be a salvation from the "perverse generation"—that evil generation of Jews who crucified the Lord. This was *externally* accomplished in baptism. They *outwardly* left the old order of things that had sought the Lord's crucifixion and came under the Lord's authority as His subjects. Those who accepted Peter's teaching as true, were baptized: 3000 of those baptized (whether that included all who were baptized, we are not told) were added to the newly formed Christian company, the Assembly, and they persevered in the apostles' doctrine, etc. (v.42). They *disassociated* themselves from Judaism and came on new ground—Christianity, outwardly.

### **The Next Issue**

The next issue, enclosed, looks at baptism in relation to burial (Rom.6); the Ethiopian Eunuch, the reception of the Holy Spirit, an Old Testament illustration, Galatians 3:27, 1 Corinthians 15:29-30, the mode of baptism, the "name" of baptism, the Assembly and baptism, and baptized households, as well as a conclusion. Again, we pray to our Lord that you can view this subject through God's Word and not through the filter of prejudice of what "someone I admire told me."

The reason for sending both issues at one time is two fold. First, they are so connected and the subject so controversial, they need to be read together. Secondly, I am allowing a longer time between these issues and our final "epilogue" issue so if letters are sent expressing in Christian kindness an alternate view, these can be published and commented on, along with our final issue.

RPD