

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

05-82

Dear Reader,

This issue concludes our 9-years of doctrinal studies. We again trust you will without prejudice carefully study the previous issue and this one so you will have assurance of *God's* teaching as to baptism. Be a Berean (Acts 17:11): receive but prove it before believing it. In case anyone thinks we have put this at the end of the publication of the *Assembly Messenger* so we won't have to answer questions about it, we will respond to kindly written, scripturally supported, signed letters as part of our final mailing in about two months. In the Lord's will, this future final issue will summarize the past 9 years, thank many helpers, and contain an index of all 83 *Assembly Messenger* issues. So let's read on.

## Baptized Unto Christ's Death: Burial (Rom.6)

Romans 6:3-4 states, "Are you ignorant that we, as many as have been baptized unto Christ Jesus, have been baptized unto His death? We have been buried therefore with Him by baptism *unto death* in order that, even as Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life."

We have seen that baptism is God's appointed means for *externally* entering the sphere of profession, and in this regard, that baptism transports *externally* from the corrupt sphere to that sphere which is under the authority of Christ. Here we have the added truth that Christian baptism is *unto Christ's death*: that death is what is in view. In baptism we are *buried with Him* unto (with a view towards) death. In baptism we take our place as dead to the world which we have just (externally) left. A dead person has nothing to do with the world he has died out of. Baptism, according to these verses, appears to stop at *burial*—at taking the place of being dead. However, the *object* is, even as Christ was raised from the dead, that we should walk in newness of life. We are to walk on the other side of death as alive to Christ, caring only for His interests.

These verses show the importance of baptism soon after becoming a disciple of Christ, whether or not the person is a "disciple indeed." One does not bury a person who has been *living* for a long time. One buries a sinner who desires to take that place of outward death that he may no longer walk as a sinner, but in newness of life in a life lived for Christ. Time will tell the reality of that desire. God views the saved sinner as a *saint*—a sanctified one.

So the new things we learn here is that baptism has Christ's death in view, an outward picture of being buried *with Him* in death, for only a dead person is buried. And we learn the object of that burial is to walk on the other side of death in newness of a new life. Buried *with Him* shows *identification* with Him!

## The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:36-39)

The fact that baptism should take place very soon after one professes salvation is illustrated in Acts 8 by the example of the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip preached Christ to him—and it seems he also preached baptism (as did Peter in Acts 2), or how else would the eunuch have known about it? "And as they went along the way, they came upon a certain water and the eunuch says, Behold water; what hinders my being baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stop. And they went down both to the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he [Philip] baptized him [the eunuch]. But when they came up out of the water ..." (vv.36-39). Obviously after being told of its importance, the eunuch wanted it done immediately: the first water would do, and it was done almost immediately. There probably was no one else around. We should likewise reasonably quickly baptize those who profess salvation.

We have seen that baptism is of professors, of disciples. Many or most Christians strongly believe it should be done to true believers only. That flies in the face of Matthew 28, but is there a verse that says one must be truly saved before baptism? Verse 37 of the portion above is the verse that makes it clear! The eunuch has just said to Philip in the KJV, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Verse 37 then continues, "And Philip said, if thou *believest with all thine heart*, thou mayest. And he [the eunuch] answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Then the "believers baptists" are right; more than profession is needed. Is that correct?

There is one huge flaw in this argument. Verse 37 is recognized by most translators as being added by men. It is overwhelmingly not found in the best manuscripts. The few manuscripts where the verse is found are late manuscripts. Indeed, the JND, NASB, NIV and FWG translations all reject the verse, as does the Nestles Greek-English Interlinear. It is found in the KJV/Stephens Greek text, although 5 of the 6 recognized

19<sup>th</sup> century editors of the basic Greek text used for the KJV reject the verse. It is found in the NKJV, although the Greek text (the so-called *Majority Text*) used for the NKJV does not include the verse. So the use of this verse is *very* shaky ground to hang a doctrine on! Why does this truth seem to anger so many? Are we preaching error? If not, then accept God's Word, not a wrong translation of it!

So the Ethiopian was baptized on his acceptance of being baptized as the Lord's disciple. He had a change in outward position from Judaism to Christianity. There is every indication the profession was real, but that is not the point.

### **Baptism and the Reception of the Holy Spirit**

Sometimes there are questions as to baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. In Acts it occurred both ways. Of course, Acts relates the transition time between Judaism and Christianity and we have to take this into account in interpreting occurrences in Acts. But we can show that in both Acts 2 (which we have studied) and in Acts 8, the Holy Spirit came *after* baptism and, of course, only to those who believed with their heart. In Acts 8 we see that Philip had preached in Samaria, announcing the glad tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. The crowd that heard him believed and were baptized, both men and women. Simon (who we saw was not a true believer) also believed and was baptized (vv.4-13). Peter and John then came and "prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He was not yet fallen on any of them; only they were baptized to the name of the Lord Jesus" (v.16). Peter and John then laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Of course, this did not include Simon and any other mere professors, if there were any others (we aren't told).

In Acts 10 we have the case of Cornelius, his family and his close friends. In verse 44 the Holy Spirit fell on those *hearing* Peter's words—obviously a true *hearing*. "Then Peter answered, Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as we also did? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." In this case, baptism came *after* the reception of the Holy Spirit. Where did the water come from? How much do you think was brought?

In summary, the Jews had to be baptized before receiving the Holy Spirit. But not so with the Gentiles. The Samaritans were similar to the Jews, so they received the Holy Spirit after being baptized.

Today, it should be obvious that for the true believer who is just saved and has not been baptized before, the Holy Spirit (who is received "upon believing"—John 7:39; Ephesians 1:13) comes before baptism. For the baptized mere professor, the Holy Spirit will *never* come unless the professor actually is saved at a later date.

### **Old Testament Illustration of Baptism: the Cloud and the Sea (1 Cor.10:2)**

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:2 "that our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the [Red] Sea and all were baptized *unto Moses* in the cloud and in the sea." I am not aware of anyone of Israel actually being *in* the cloud and we are told they didn't even get wet in the Red Sea (Ex.14:22). They were *under* the cloud and passed through the *midst* of the Sea. But nevertheless these are pictures of baptism. Why? The ones who were in that position had become followers of Moses, had become *his* disciples, if you like. We know many of them were not true believers by their actions in the wilderness, yet they in general *outwardly* followed Moses. The cloud *separated them* from the heat of the wilderness (Ps.105:39) and from their enemies (Ex.14:19-20). It put them in a unique position—in a little moveable but sacred area of the wilderness, the camp of Israel, where they were outwardly subject to God's directions through Moses (Ex.13:21-22; 40:36-37; Num.9:15-22; Neh.9:19).

In like manner, the Red Sea (a symbol of Christ dying for us) *separated* Israel from Egypt, a well known symbol in Scripture of the world and its pleasures. Moses gave up the pleasures and treasures of Egypt to follow Christ (Heb.11:24-29). Through the picture of *baptism in the Red Sea*, all of Israel were *buried with Christ* and came out on the other side under the authority of Jehovah through Moses, to walk in newness of life. Although many failed in their walk and proved the non-reality of their confession, this in no way affects the picture that God shows us in this verse.

### **Have Put On Christ**

Another interesting verse is found in Galatians 3:27. It says, "For ye, as many as have been baptized unto Christ, have *put on Christ*." Here, baptism is pictured as putting on Christ as one would put on clothing. Again, as always when baptism is in view, this is outward only. Clothing is an *external* covering and does not change the inward man, although it *outwardly* indicates to others something about the person which may be a true indication or not. A person who outwardly "puts on Christ" has taken the position before men of being *Christian*. This is widely recognized in the religious

community. Baptism is seen as a rejection of what was previously believed.

### **Baptized in Place of the Dead**

Still another interesting passage is found in 1 Corinthians 15:29-30. It says, "Since what shall the baptized for [in place of, JND note] the dead do if those who are dead rise not at all? Why also are they baptized *for* them? Why do we endanger ourselves every hour?" Why are people baptized in place of the dead? 1 Corinthians 15 is the great chapter on resurrection. If there was no resurrection to life, to blessing, why should any effort be expended to bring subjects under the authority of the King and see to it that they were taught the things of God? But, thank God, the dead in Christ shall rise again in bodies changed to be like our Lord's body of glory (1 Cor.15:51-54; Phil.3:21-22; 1 Th.4:13-18). Thus, there is every need to disciple the nations, to bring subjects into the kingdom, that God may save them and that they may grow in God's things and carry on the testimony until our Lord comes for us.

### **The Mode of Baptism**

This brings us to the *mode* of baptism. Nearly every evangelical/fundamentalist Christian would tell you the only acceptable mode is *immersion*. But of all the baptisms recorded in Scripture, the mode has to be *assumed*, and may not be the same in every case. John baptized in the Jordan River. It is *assumed* the persons baptized were immersed completely under the water; the same with the Ethiopian. But with John, Scripture says he baptized *with* water, not *in* water (Mt.3:11, etc). The Lord Jesus came up to the shore *from* the water (Mt.3:16). Where did so much water come from to baptize Cornelius and those with him, if they were immersed? It is thought by many that immersion best fits burial: it does so in my mind. But in many cases large amounts of water would not be available. The Holy Spirit *fell* upon some. Would God have an ordinance that couldn't be carried out in many parts of the world, in many climates, at least with the urgency of time Scripture indicates as the divine requirement? In burial, dirt is thrown on the body in the grave.

The Greek words *baptisma/baptizo* are given slightly different meanings by different dictionaries, such as dip, plunge, wash, get fully wet. So we simply can't prove from Scripture that immersion or pouring water over the person is the right or wrong method. In the divinely-given Old Testament example of baptism (1 Cor.10), no one in Israel was *actually* immersed in the cloud or in the sea. The sea was on both sides of them and the cloud was above them. In our Western society with hot water heaters, we can carry out immersion, and do so quickly,

as often as needed, but we need to be careful not to despise those who are "sprinkled." Given the above, what would you do with one sick or dying in a hospital who just professed Christ and wanted to be baptized? Remember, the responsibility is with the baptizer!

### **The "Name" of Baptism**

The Holy Spirit up to the time of Acts 8 had fallen only on those baptized to the "name of the Lord" (Acts 8:16). The same expression is used in relation to the rebaptized disciples of John (Acts 19:5). But the introductory verses to Christian baptism, Matthew 28: 18-20, gives a fuller name (singular)—"baptizing them to the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Bob Costen adds, Because of Acts 2, 10 and 19, "baptized to the name of the Lord," many who baptize say, "I baptize you to the name of the Lord Jesus in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

### **The Assembly and Baptism**

As far as I can find, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture to indicate *the assembly* has any involvement in baptism. Baptism simply is not an assembly-ordinance! We have seen it is a kingdom ordinance! Perhaps a local assembly should feel a certain shame if there are any breaking bread who never have been baptized. That *is* the assembly's responsibility, for the Lord wants His own to be baptized and any refusal to comply would cast serious doubt on the fitness of a person to be breaking bread. The assembly certainly shouldn't throw up any difficulties, for baptism, being a kingdom ordinance, is between the baptizer and the person baptized: *the assembly has nothing to do with either when it comes to baptism!* Would the assembly get involved in who preached a funeral or who performed a marriage? Brethren of an assembly might think certain choices were unwise, but that's as far as it could go, since neither are assembly functions.

Neither does the assembly *sponsor* a baptism, whatever that term means. If it means it provides a facility, then that's fine. Some individual or individuals from an assembly might feel exercised to perform the baptism or to speak at a baptism. That might be especially true if they had brought the gospel to the person and he or she had professed salvation. Think of children's work. Who would have the right to refuse someone from the neighborhood who, when hearing there was going to be a baptism, stated he or she had professed Christ and would like to be baptized? No one!

### **Baptized Households**

“You and your house” seems to be a major principle of God’s dealings with mankind in both the Old and New Testaments. The linking together of a believer and his household in *external* privilege (or judgment) is a principle throughout Scripture. We will only look at a few examples of *privilege*. Noah was told to bring all his *household* into the ark, but the basis was *his* faith (Gen.7:1). Before the angels destroyed Sodom, they told Lot to get all who were *his* out of town. Only two of his daughters actually left with him, but the others could have been blessed *simply because they were of Lot’s household* (Gen.19:12-15). In Exodus 12:3 it was a Passover lamb (a type of Christ) *for a house*. The whole house was blessed, no matter who comprised the house. Regardless of the salvation of those in the house, they *all* were externally saved (from being killed by the destroying angel) if even one in that household had the faith to apply the blood to the doorway (Ex.12:7, 13). We have just seen the account of Cornelius, but would add that salvation was to come not only to him, but to his house (Acts 11:4).

Except for the household of Crispus (Acts 18:8) where baptism is only implied, we have plain statements in Acts 16:14-15; 33-34 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 that *households* were baptized. Another possible recorded household baptism is the household of Cornelius (Acts 11:14; 10:23,33,44). If all Israel were baptized in the cloud and the sea, that would include thousands of households.

Why does God use the expression *households* in relation to baptism? Why not just name the individual professors there? Many attempts have been made to ascertain who in each household actually believed or made profession before the baptism. Many have argued that no young children existed in those households, but this is an impossible task. God has *intentionally* not told us. Is it because all in the household come under the faith of the head of that house, as in the Old Testament examples above?

We’ll let you study and pray about the implications, but if you can see the general truth of the main part of this two-part article on baptism, then perhaps you won’t have as strong a feeling against those who, acting in faith, believing strongly in the principle of the outward blessing of Christian households, have their households, including young children, baptized and (to their thinking) *outwardly* entered into the kingdom, *outwardly* on holy ground, to be brought up in the “discipline and admonition of the Lord” (Eph.6:4). The Christian parent or parents know that, unlike the false doctrine of “baptismal regeneration,” the baptism of their children neither eternally saves the children nor enters them into the Church.

We ask for prayer that we might understand this aspect of baptism better and not fail the Lord by going beyond Scripture or falling short of what it teaches. What are the implications of Peter’s words in Acts 2:39, “to your children,” immediately after speaking of baptism? Please be much in prayer as to this matter which generates so much heat and in some cases, almost hatred. Be very sure you’re not fighting *God!*

## Conclusion

So, a simple thing to carry out has a multitude of meanings, of things it pictures. But since baptism is so controversial, maybe it’s better to ignore it. Absolutely not! The verses we’ve looked at indicate how important it is to the Lord to have an externally-separated company on earth which owns Him as Lord. Reality is not in question and should not be a hindrance to baptism virtually immediately upon profession.

If you will please the Lord you will be baptized because Scripture makes it plain that is God’s will. Maybe you don’t understand the detail: seek baptism anyway. Then you have time to prayerfully seek to determine God’s mind as to the detailed meanings of baptism and the correct practice of it. This will take prayer and exercise. It may necessitate the reevaluation of long-held beliefs. Are you prepared for that consequence?

It is our desire and prayer that all writings of men be brought to the test of the Word of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Th.5:21) and that some further knowledge of the things of God will be gained by reading about and studying the subject of baptism.

Again, I urge you to search the Scriptures! Don’t assume the above is right and don’t assume it’s wrong. Get the teaching you hold on to *from the Scriptures*, rightly interpreted. You have the Holy Spirit who will *teach* you all things (Jn.14:26). But *teaching* implies time spent searching! It implies effort on your part. It implies prayer. Please take the time and effort! We deeply trust that we will see the *scriptural view* of these things and not have simply an emotional response or a dig-in-the-heels response.

RPD

One final issue to come, the Lord willing. I consider it to have been a wonderful privilege to have been enabled for 9 years to seek before the Lord to present complicated truth in hopefully easy to understand language that has caused you to “search the Scriptures.”