

“Baptism”
Acts 2:41

August 12, 2012

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A. Introduction

1. our text today is, 'So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.' (Acts 2:41)
 - a. this is part one of a two-part sermon
 - b. next week, Lord willing, we shall speak from the same text
 - (A) our title being, 'Joining God's Community'
 - (B) and the subject will be the need of every Christian to become an active participant, committed to a local Bible-believing church
 - c. but today's message is preparatory to that next week
 - (A) for the Biblical order as found in the NT is
 - (B) salvation by faith
 - (C) obedience in the matter of baptism
 - (D) then becoming a member in the fellowship of the local church

2. Faith Fellowship is a baptist church
 - a. it is part of our name
 - b. we do not hide this distinctive behind some other title
 - c. but one can be too aggressive on this subject
 - (A) The story is told of one old Baptist minister in the southern U. S. who preached every Sunday on baptism by immersion. His folks agreed with his doctrine, but they felt there was a need for some variety.
 - (B) The deacons undertook to solve the problem through diplomatic means. They complimented him on his pulpit skills and suggested to him that he was such a natural preacher that they wanted to try an experiment. They wanted to hand him a piece of paper with a Scripture lesson on it just before he stepped into the pulpit. 'We believe that you're so good,' they said, 'that you can preach a great sermon with no preparation at all – just that slip of paper.'
 - (C) What preacher could resist an approach like that? So, the deacons got busy searching the

Scriptures for a text which was totally unrelated to baptism by immersion. They selected the opening verse of Genesis: 'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.' Surely that could have nothing to do with baptism!

- (D) When they handed the text to him, the old preacher read it aloud three times. Finally, he turned to the congregation and said, 'If I remember geography right, the earth is one-quarter land and three-quarters water. Water brings me to my subject for the day: Baptism by immersion.'
- d. I have tried to avoid this error: in the dozen years I have served here as pastor, this is only the fourth time I have preached on the subject
 - e. but some baptist groups go to extremes: with those that do not believe and practise baptism the way they do, they refuse to pray, to co-operate in evangelism, or even to admit they are Christian
 - f. yet, I, like you, have enjoyed Christian fellowship and met in prayer with godly Christians; have read books and benefited by Christian scholars and teachers; people with whom we disagree on the matter of the mode and application of baptism
 - g. but that does not mean that it is unimportant – Jesus made it a part of His great commission – 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:19-20) – and this command and commission has never been rescinded.

B. Some False Ideas on Baptism

1. Baptism Saves a Person: False!

a. as taught by analogy with the OT covenant

- (A) by this a son was circumcised on the eighth day to bring him into God's covenant made first with Abraham, and later with Israel
- (B) but at the very best, teaching by analogy is dangerous
- (C) the analogy, for example, only justifies baptizing male children
- (D) moreover it is wrong – for when we read one of the verses used to support this in its context – that is, Colossians 2:11-12, 'and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried

with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.' – it is made clear that no external rite such as circumcision or baptism saves, but rather through faith

b. as taught by misapplying 1 Peter 3:20-21

- (A) '... when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding (AV: the like figure whereunto) to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ'
- (B) that word 'corresponding' or 'like' introduces a figure of speech where the reader is expected to associate the like elements from the illustration with that which they illustrate
 - (1) it was not the water that saved Noah and his family; neither is it the water of baptism that saves – in both cases that water means not salvation but death
 - (2) hence the effect of water can only to clean the body
 - (3) what saved Noah's family was the ark that brought them out of the water that meant death; what saves the believer is that which raises them out of death, Christ's own resurrection

2. Baptism Is an Initiation into a Church: False!

- a. the world has borrowed the term 'member' used in Scripture of being part of the body of Christ, the church consisting of all believers
- b. and has taken it to refer to being part of a group with common goals
- c. so it is used in fraternities, in lodges, in unions, with the members of these addressing each other as brother and so on
- d. to become a member of these it is often necessary to go through some form of initiation – frequently demeaning or embarrassing – which unites the initiate with all the others who have suffered the same way
- e. but baptism by immersion in water is not the means whereby we are united with either the universal nor the local body of Christ
- f. it is a baptism of a far more powerful nature, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 'For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also

is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.'

g. water baptism is no mere initiation ceremony into Christ's church

C. Water Baptism Is a Confession

1. In Jewish Proselyte Baptism^{-{3}}.

- a. when proselytes entered into the OT covenant – and there were many like the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 who came to Jerusalem to worship the one, true God – they were baptized before being accepted
- b. such baptism was a confession, 'I am wholly unclean because of sin, and so cannot come to the holy God of Israel without total cleansing.'
- c. so there existed baptismal holes in Jerusalem where such proselytes could be immersed; so, on the day of Pentecost, this presented no problem and there was no need to go down to the Jordan

2. In John's Baptism

- a. John ranged the length of the Jordan valley baptizing, as found in
- b. Matthew 3:6, 8, 'and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. ... Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;' so repentance and confession were prominent
- c. as John reprimanded the spiritual rulers who came only for show, it is clear that the Jews understood the nature of his baptism; that in similarity to proselyte baptism they were in effect confessing 'I am wholly unclean because of sin, and cannot meet the Messiah without total cleansing.' – thereby saying, 'I am no better than a Gentile.'

3. In Christian Baptism

- a. in the verses before today's text, Peter exhorted his audience on the day of Pentecost with these words: 'Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.'" And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"' (Acts 2:38-40)

- b. again repentance is involved; again confession is involved; but now there is much more than a mere sign of the need of cleansing
 - (A) those who confessed the name of Jesus Christ; those who accepted that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of God
 - (B) would receive God's Holy Spirit, and with Him the fulfilment of the promise of the OT, that God put a new, cleansed spirit in them
- c. then comes our text: '**So then, those who had received his word** (that is those who engaged in the act of faith) **were baptized;...**'

D. Baptism Is by Immersion

1. The Word Baptize

- a. is just an Anglicisation of the Greek word, baptizo, 'to dip or plunge'
- b. it is a word that was used in classical Greek with an active meaning of 'to sink' as for example, a ship; and with a passive meaning 'to drown'
- c. I have heard anecdotally, but have been unable to find evidence, that when the Authorised version was translated, baptizo and its related words, missed being translated 'immerse', etc., by one vote of the council of bishops who reviewed the translation
- d. it is in some ways unfortunate that such was the case, because as a result the mode and practise after the reformation was presumed by most to be the same as that which had previously prevailed
- e. but the mode of NT baptism was immersion

2. The Examples of Baptism

- a. I strongly suspect that the following story is just that, a story
- b. but it does, nevertheless, make the point I wish to make
- c. **One Sunday, the 'Minister' was giving a sermon on baptism and in the course of his sermon he was illustrating the fact that baptism should take place by sprinkling and not by immersion. He pointed out some instances in the Bible. He said that when John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the River Jordan, it didn't mean in – it meant close to, round about, or nearby. And again when it says in the Bible that Philip baptized the eunuch in the river, it didn't mean in – it meant close to, round about, or nearby.**

- d. After the service, a man came up to the minister and told him it was a great sermon, one of the best he had ever heard, and that it had cleared up a great many mysteries he had encountered in the Bible.
- e. 'For instance,' he said, 'the story about Jonah getting swallowed by the whale has always bothered me. Now I know that Jonah wasn't really in the whale, but close to, round about, or nearby, swimming in the water.'
- f. 'Then there is the story about the three young Hebrew boys who were thrown into the furious furnace, but were not burned. Now I see that they were not really in the fire, just close to, round about, or nearby, just keeping warm.'
- g. 'But the hardest of all the stories for me to believe has always been the story of Daniel getting thrown into the lions' den. But now I see that he wasn't really in the lions' den, but close to, round about, or nearby, like at the zoo.'
- h. 'The revealing of these mysteries have been a real comfort me because I am a wicked man. Now I am gratified to know that I won't be in Hell, but close to, round about, or nearby. And next Sunday, I won't have to be in church, just close to, round about, or nearby. Thanks. You have really put my mind at ease.'^{4}.
- i. now, that is, perhaps, a bit exaggerated but it does serve to show how difficult it is to read into the NT Scripture on baptism any mode but that of immersion
- j. so also is the case of

3. The Picture of Baptism

- a. which is found in a number of places in the NT but most notably in Romans 6:3-7, 'Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.'
- b. first of all let us assure ourselves that what is being described here is the spiritual reality that lies behind the external act of baptism

- (A) those who are baptized 'in the Name (singular, representing One God) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Three Persons)' are testifying to the fact that they have been baptized by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
 - (B) as such they have been united with Christ; they are in Christ
 - (1) when He died, they died; His death was for their sin, paying its penalty, diverting God's wrath from their guilt
 - (2) when He arose from the dead, they too were raised from the death in sin inherited from Adam; born again to the newness of life which is in Christ Jesus
 - (3) in this spiritual baptism, the old nature is put to death, and the new nature is given life and power in Jesus Christ
 - (C) so, as Paul says in Galatians 2:20-21, 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.'
- c. this is the picture and confession that baptism makes; any other mode than immersion fails in painting that picture; the baptism of any one other than a believer cannot draw this picture or make this confession

E. Conclusion

1. Baptism Is Only a Start

- a. 'So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.' (Acts 2:41)
- b. There was this sinner who would get religion every time they had a revival meeting, and then he would backslide until the next revival. After about six times at the baptizing hole, the preacher put him under, raised him up, and said, 'You've been baptized so much that the fish know you by your first name.' —{5}.
- c. baptism is not only a confession
- d. but baptism is also an identifying of oneself with Jesus Christ
- e. and that means it is a commitment to Him who is Lord

2. Baptism Points in Two Directions

- a. it points back to our death to our old life when we came to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ
- b. it points ahead to our being raised to new life and to the desire to obey our Lord, Jesus Christ
- c. these are the themes that make it so appropriate that Trust and Obey, our closing hymn, has become so strongly associated with believer's baptism

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AV Authorized (King James) Version

ERV The Revised Version of 1885

NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)

2. '*Baptism Humor*' – Dynamic Preaching (www.sermons.com) Disk, Winter 1993 'A' – Kerux illustration #2752
3. See chapter 4 (to which chapter 3 gives necessary background) of '*The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*', by R. E. O. White, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company © 1960 by the author.
4. Kerux illustrations #7000
5. Russell Hensley - The Preacher Joke Book, edited by Loyal Jones, p. 3 – Kerux illustration #6635