

# Church Membership 7

Last week we looked at the subject of Baptism from the Baptist point of view. Tonight we will look at it from the Paedo-Baptist viewpoint. Again I remind you of the extract from the highly popular *Systematic Theology* written by Wayne Grudem, a Baptist writer, which I attached to last week's notes. Grudem pleads for tolerance on this issue and argues, as does our church that differences over baptism should not hinder those who agree on the essentials of the Gospel from joining together in church membership.

## 1 The Mode of Baptism

In Matthew 28:19 the church is commanded to 'teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'.

- (a) The Greek word for 'baptize' (*baptizo*) has the primary meaning of immersing or dipping. It has a secondary meaning of covering (with water) in any way.
- (b) The Bible defines the way a Greek or Hebrew word is to be understood – e.g. the Greek word connected with our communion service *deipnon* was the word for the chief meal of the day, usually taken in the evening. In the communion service the word is connected with remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for sinners. We have no problem with celebrating communion in the morning.
- (c) Comparing Acts 10:44-48 with Acts 11: 15, 16 we see that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was by pouring. Although the language used is symbolic we must bear in mind that 'burial' with Christ in baptism is also symbolic. In fact Christ was not placed under the ground in His burial but in a sepulchre cut out of the side of a rock.
  - The Greek word for baptism is found in Mark 7:4 where it refers to the washing of cups, pots, brazen vessels and tables (or beds) by the Jews when they returned from the market. They did not immerse these objects but merely sprinkled water upon them.
  - The Greek word for baptism is also found in Hebrews 9: 10, translated 'washings' and there it refers to the ceremonial 'sprinklings' referred to in verses 13, 19, and 21 of the chapter.
  - The earliest works of Christian art extant show Christ being baptized by John the Baptist by pouring water upon Him.
- (d) John's baptism at Aenon required 'much water' (John 3:23) because running water was necessary in order to effect purification. 'Much water' would indicate springs of water, according to some writers.
- (e) Baptism by immersion is perfectly valid whatever view we take of the meaning of the word baptism. It is to be recommended where possible to avoid controversy but it is clearly not suitable for some disabled people, and it would be very cruel to deny them a Scriptural ordinance because they are not able to be immersed.

## 2 The Subjects of Baptism

- (a) In Mark chapter 16 verses 15 and 16 we see the Scriptural order: belief before baptism. This is the order for adults as children are not being referred to at all, otherwise we would have to conclude from verse 16 that all children dying in infancy and incapable of exercising saving faith are lost.
- (b) Church History tells us that it was the practice of the early church to baptize infants.
  - Justin Martyr in 138AD said there were 'many persons of both sexes who had been made disciples of Christ from their infancy.'
  - Irenaeus who was born around 97AD acknowledges infant baptism, as does Tertullian who was born in Carthage in 160AD.
  - Origen who was born in Egypt in 185AD said 'it was the usage of the church to baptize infants', and that 'the church had received the tradition from the apostles'.

- Augustine who was born in 358AD said that infant baptism 'is held by the whole church, not instituted by councils, but always retained'. This Augustine was a great man of God who wrote his *Confessions* and *City of God*, and he is to be distinguished from the Augustine who came to England in 597AD.
  - Pelagius (354AD-420/440AD), a British heretic visited all parts of the church from Britain to Syria and admitted that infant baptism was practised, even though he disagreed with it.
  - Infant Baptism was practised by virtually all evangelical churches down to the time of the Reformation and has been practised by the majority of Protestant denominations, with the exception of Baptists and a few others, since that time.
  - If Infant Baptism is an innovation there should have been some indication of controversy when it was introduced – but Church History has no record of any such controversy.
- (c) In the Bible children are considered part of the visible church.
- They are addressed in Ephesians 6: 1-3 in a letter to 'the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus'. They are similarly addressed in Colossians.
  - In 1 Corinthians 7: 14 Paul indicates that the children of believers are 'holy'. The word carries the thought of 'separated to God', according to Abbott-Smith's Lexicon, and these children are distinguished from the children of the ungodly whom Paul designates 'unclean'.
  - In John 21: 15 Christ instructed Peter to 'Feed my lambs'. The 'lambs' are believed to be the children and this shows us the church's responsibility to the children of its members.
  - In the New Testament we have the baptism of families – those of Lydia and the jailor in Acts 16 and that of Stephanas in 1 Corinthians. Perhaps all in those families were saved, but it is striking that we rarely hear of families being baptized nowadays. We need to bear in mind that relatively few incidents of baptism are recorded in the New Testament, yet the three cited are amongst that number – a high percentage.
- (d) Christ blessed the children who were brought to Him and said that 'of such is the kingdom of heaven'. The expression 'kingdom of heaven' is used to describe the visible church in Matthew 13: 24-30 and indeed again and again in Matthew 13.
- (e) All evangelicals agree that children have a special place in Christ's Church. We do not accept the view of the militant atheist Richard Dawkins that 'there is no such thing as a Christian child'.
- (e) In the New Testament Baptism and the Lord's Supper have replaced Circumcision and The Passover in the ordinances of the church. Colossians 2: 11, 12 shows that baptism has replaced circumcision. This has implications for children.
- The male children were circumcised, otherwise they could not later have played any part in the affairs of the nation and the Old Testament church.
  - Circumcision was a seal of faith, according to Romans 4: 11, yet God commanded it to be applied to infants incapable of exercising faith. Those who object to the baptism of the children of believers on the ground that they are incapable of exercising faith would have the same problem with the clearly God-ordained circumcision of children in the Old Testament. It must be emphasised that the baptism of all children is not contended for – only the baptism of believers' children.
  - Baptized children do not possess the full rights of church membership. Like minors in a nation they come under instruction and discipline and do not possess voting rights. When of full age they must show evidence of repentance and faith in Christ before they are admitted to the communicant membership of the church.

## Conclusions

1 Try not to make Baptism a contentious issue. See that both Baptists and Paedo-Baptists have a credible case.

2 Proverbs 22: 6 instructs us to: 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' Our aim should be to see our children saved and walking with God and this verse is a very precious promise to encourage us forward in that direction.