

BAPTISM

Chapter Twelve

Water Baptism as It Relates to the Doctrine of Separation

The Bible is a combination of various books, each inspired by God, involving God's progressive revelation of Himself and His prophetic plan for the world. Every book was like adding another perfect member to an already perfect choir with each new revelation singing in perfect harmony with those revelations and truths that preceded them. No doctrines in the Word of God contradict one another. If the harmony of God's revelation is going to exist, every doctrine of God's Word must exist in its connection with others in perfect purity of voice without any contradictions. Every individual doctrine serves its unique purpose in the choir of progressive revelation. This is certainly true of the doctrine of water baptism in its relationship to the doctrine of separation and the purity of the local church. Church, as both an *organization* and an *organism*, does not work apart from a formal membership united by the communal decision in water baptism and in the practical application of Congregational Government.

There is much discussion these days about whether God intends the doctrine of separation to maintain the purity of the Gospel or to maintain the purity of the Church. Even for those that might agree that maintaining the purity of the Church is God's primary purpose in the doctrine of separation, many of those agreeing cannot agree on exactly what defines the term Church. There certainly seems to be a complete disregard in these discussions, regarding the purpose of separation, for the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ as His ministry presently relates to local churches. Certainly, the High Priestly ministry of Christ in His seven epistles to the seven local churches in Revelation chapters two and three give us precedent to conclude dogmatically that Christ is teaching that separation is critical to the purity of the local church.

The purity of any local church begins with the purity of the Gospel she understands and proclaims. The first area of the purity of any local church is the purity of a *regenerated membership*. If the Gospel is corrupted, or a biblical response to the Gospel is corrupted, unregenerate people may be added to the membership of a local church. Infant baptism and baptismal regeneration are corrupted responses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This corruption filled various denominational churches with unregenerate people and kept them in their state of unregeneration by their continuing misplaced faith in a *sacramental ritual*. Therefore, the first line of defense against a corrupted membership in any local church is the careful examination of the understanding of the Gospel, and the faith response to the Gospel, of those seeking membership. Ultimately, the weight of

responsibility for a pure local church, and the final decision to include anyone in the membership of a local church, is made through Congregational Government. The maintenance of the purity of any local church is also accomplished through pastoral administration and Congregational Government as each individual member is held accountable for his practice of the doctrine of separation.

Obviously, water baptism is the connecting link and beginning point to the practical application of a number of other doctrines as they apply to the purity of local church membership, the discipleship of all believers in the local church, practical sanctification, and personal evangelism by the members of a local church. Therefore, water baptism is undoubtedly the initial step in the practice of biblical separation. Another thing that ought to be obviously, understanding the significance of water baptism beyond its being merely a testimonial ritual regarding a person's salvation is absolutely essential.

Ekklesia (ek-klay-see'-ah), the Greek word that is translated "church" in our KJV English Bibles, is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood and misapplied words in our English language. The word is made up of the primary preposition *ek*, which means *out from* in the sense of origin, "the point whence action or motion proceeds."¹ *Ek* is used in conjunction with the Greek word *kaleo* (kal-eh'-o), which means *to call forth*. Together, these two Greek words refer to the calling of a group of believers in Jesus Christ out from the world to gather in an assembly. We find this meaning of a *call to assembly* as the common usage in Scripture. Therefore, the very nature of the word *Ekklesia* implies separation from the world. To understand the term apart from the nature of the *out calling from the world* is to corrupt its primary meaning and its initial position of purity from worldliness and false doctrines. The initial context of any local assembly is to assemble in purity *from the world*. We see this in Acts 19:30-41.

³⁰ And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. ³¹ And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. ³² Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly {*ekklesia*} was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. ³³ And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. ³⁴ But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians. ³⁵ And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, *Ye* men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of

¹ *Strong's Greek Dictionary*, SwordSearcher Software 6.1

the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter? ³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. ³⁷ For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. ³⁸ Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. ³⁹ But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly {*ekklesia*}. ⁴⁰ For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. ⁴¹ And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly {*ekklesia*}" (Acts 19:30-41).

Although the three uses of the Greek word *ekklesia* in Acts 19:32, 39, and 40 all refer to a *public, secular assembly* rather than a *local church assembly*, the important thing we see in the use of *ekklesia* in these three uses is that it is used of an *assembly*. Therefore, the primary meaning of *ekklesia* regarding the definition of a local church is about an *assembly* or *congregation*. A local church then exists in two dynamics:

1. *Called out* from the world to *assemble* for the primary purpose of being taught the Word of God to prepare each believer for evangelism
2. *Sent out* into the world to evangelize and make disciples

Since the times of Augustine, the doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology) has been corrupted. The Reformers did little, if anything at all, to correct Augustine's perverted Ecclesiology. Although Augustine saw the Church as both visible and invisible, he taught that all of God's promises to the nation of Israel were now given to the Church. He based his view of the Church primarily upon his corrupted allegorical interpretations of prophecy and his false views of the end times (Eschatology). Augustine's book *The City of God* exposes his Theonomic view of the Church known as *Amillennialism*. In this view, Augustine rejected a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ in a future Kingdom Age. Instead, he proposed that the prophecies regarding the Kingdom Age had already been fulfilled (*Preterism*) and that Christ was ruling the world through the *holy Catholic Church* with the Pope as the *Vicar of Christ*. He taught that the *holy Catholic Church* would one day usher in complete rule in a new utopian *one-world* government and a new utopian *one-world* social order (*Theonomic Amillennialism*). In this view of the Church, people were initiated into this *holy Catholic Church* through water baptism as the first step in their salvation and entrance into the *Kingdom*.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D) and Thomas of Aquino (1225-1274 A.D.) were the two main writers of systemic Theology for centuries. Both of these men were Roman Catholics.

Martin Luther (1483-1546 A.D.), the man accredited with being the *father of the Reformation*, did not come on the scene until about 300 years later. Other than *Luther's Catechism*, the *1646 Westminster Confession of Faith* is one of the first theological documents (doctrinal statements) we have coming from the Reformation. Although we see some variations from Augustine's Ecclesiology, there are still a number of aberrations even in this Reformed Roman Catholic view of the Church. Luther reformed very little. The *1646 Westminster Confession of Faith* is Reformed Theology's view of the Church.

I. The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

II. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

III. Unto this catholic and visible Church, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world; and doth by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.

IV. This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less, visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

V. The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error: and some have so degenerated as to become apparently no Churches of Christ. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to his will.

VI. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.²

² *1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, CHAPTER XXV. Of the Church*

This *Big View* of Christianity as the *Church* is the view of the *Church* held by all Reformed churches, the vast majority of Evangelical churches, and now a large portion of fundamental churches, even many Baptist churches. Nonetheless, it is an unbiblical view of Ecclesiology lacking an understanding of Dispensational transitions. It is also an impractical view of Ecclesiology because it lacks any connection to the obligations of Congregational Government in its responsibility to maintain the purity of its own regenerate membership and its responsibility regarding holding each member of a local assembly accountable for personal separation and moral turpitude. In most cases, this false Ecclesiology begins with a false understanding of water baptism as the entrance level into the formal membership of a local church and the examination of both a person's understanding of the Gospel and his obligations regarding personal separation from the world and unto God in practical sanctification in the "work of the ministry."

Obviously, the Westminster Confession sees the *Church* as something different from what we find defined by the Acts of the Apostles and epistles of the New Testament. Granted, there are portions of this statement with which we may heartedly agree, however the portions with which we disagree are a radical departure from the biblical norm. This becomes apparent in the thirty-five different times the word "churches" is used in the New Testament. This is especially true of the Revelation of Jesus Christ where He addresses the whole of that prophetic revelation to local "churches" throughout the Church Age in chapter twenty-two - "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). Christ does have a "general assembly" that He is building and will call to assemble at the beginning of the seven years of Tribulation (I Thessalonians 4:16-17), however that Church is not yet complete and has not yet ever assembled. Until we understand that Dispensational transition, we will never be able to grasp Church Age Ecclesiology.

Although we have numerous *confessions of faith* (many links below³) from various sects of Anabaptists, most of these lack any real definitiveness regarding Ecclesiology. In most part, there is not much in these documents that differentiate between the *Big View of Christianity as the Church*, except that they define Ecclesiology from the perspective of a regenerate and formally baptized membership. The 1527 Anabaptist document known as *Discipline of the Church*⁴ does give some definitive statements regarding how a local church was to maintain

³ http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/waldenses_confessions_of_faith.htm

<http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/scf.htm>

<http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/rr.htm>

<http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/def.htm>

<http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/hbd.htm>

⁴ <http://www.reformedreader.org/dotc.htm>

its moral purity and obligations to one another within their own communion of faith. If we are going to understand the doctrine of the Ecclesiology, it is critical to differentiate between the Church *in the world* and the Church *glorified*. I have done this by using two different terms in these studies:

1. The local church referring to individual congregations of individual believers united covenantally through common salvation, common doctrine, common purpose, and common practice. These *local churches* are the *Church* of the Church Age.

2. The “general assembly” of “the church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23), which is all believers of the Church Age first assembled in heaven at the resurrection/translation/glorification at the *catching away* of the Church (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). This is the *Church* of the Kingdom Age.

“¹⁸ For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, ¹⁹ And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which *voice* they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: ²⁰ (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: ²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) ²² But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel. ²⁵ See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not* we *escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: ²⁶ Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. ²⁷ And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:18-29).

The membership of the *Church in the world*, local congregations, is always banded together in *formal membership* defined as “born again” believers, baptized by immersion, living in harmony with the commands of the Word of God,

committed to being disciples of Jesus Christ intent upon fulfilling the Great Commission, and having God called officers that meet Biblical qualifications. The formal membership of the *Church in the world* biblically is always a local church and is governed by Congregational Government as each formal member of the *Body* discerns the *mind of Christ* (God's will) on any decision before them and they vote the *mind of Christ* (God's will). The formal membership constitutes a local church and is administrated by at least one pastor/teacher/bishop/elder (all in one person), who is *called* of God. God's calling of individual men, to administrate as the Bishops of local churches, is to be spiritually discerned by the formal membership of a local church discerning the will of God and signifying that discernment by a congregational *vote of acknowledgment*. No individual member of any local church can rightfully abrogate his responsibilities regarding Congregational Government in maintaining a regenerate membership and the purity of the local church regarding separation from worldliness.

The *Church glorified* (the “general assembly and church of the firstborn”) is still being *built* (Matthew 16:18b-19a; “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”). The “general assembly” is often improperly referred to as the *Universal Church*. We cannot understand the differences between the *Church in the world* and the *Church glorified* apart from understanding Dispensationalism and Dispensational transitions. For all practical purposes, the *Church glorified* does not yet exist in that it will not be assembled until after the resurrection/translation of Church Age believers when they will be glorified. The *Church glorified* is made up of all “born again” believers that are Holy Spirit baptized into the “body” of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13), indwelled, and sealed with the Holy Spirit of God from the Day of Pentecost to the beginning of the seven year Tribulation (I Thess. 4:16-17). The martyred Tribulation believers will be added to the *Church glorified* at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6). The *Church glorified* will rule with Christ during the thousand year Kingdom Age on Earth as *kings and priests* with Christ.

The confusion of the *Church in the world* (the local church) and the *Church glorified* has led to much confusion in the interpretation of Scripture regarding issues of fellowship between local churches. This defines how local churches are to interrelate with one another through cooperative fellowship. The emphasis of Scripture regarding the local church is *internal purity*. The emphasis of Scripture regarding the *Church glorified* is *organic unity*. *Internal purity* is to be maintained through Congregational Government along with pastoral administration of the local church. *Internal purity* cannot be perfectly achieved in a sinful world. *Internal purity* involves attempting to maintain a purity of membership - only “born again” members united in spirit, doctrine, and purpose. Individuals will

make false professions and become members of local churches. *Internal purity* involves maintaining purity in doctrine, purpose, and personal sanctification (holiness) of all individuals within a local church “body.”

Organic unity of the *Church glorified* will be the natural spiritual dynamic upon glorification. Although various local churches may experience a degree of *organic unity* in fellowship with one another while *in the world*, *organic unity* will never be achieved in its purest sense during the Church Age, as it will be in the Kingdom Age. There also may be varying degrees of *organic unity* within a local church membership as each individual member of that local church seeks to live in habitual practical sanctification and the filling with the Spirit of God. *Organic unity* is not a mere organizational unity in structure and practice. *Organic unity* is deep “unity of the Spirit” of a local church membership as a living spiritual organism. Water baptism is the connecting link in the decisional process of separation from worldliness and separation unto God in “the work of the ministry.”

Water baptism connects a believer to the maintenance of the internal purity of his local church by maintaining a *Believers Only* formal membership through Congregational Government - only “born again” believers were “added” to the Church.

“⁴¹ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all that believed were together, and had all things common; ⁴⁵ And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. ⁴⁶ And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, ⁴⁷ Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:41-47).

Water baptism connects a believer to the maintenance of the internal purity of his local church by maintaining a formal membership of only water baptized believers united and making purity decisions through Congregational Government regarding moral and doctrinal issues - only water baptized believers were “added to the church.”

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

Water baptism connects a believer to the maintenance of the internal purity of his local church by maintaining a formal membership through the Congregational Government of believers sharing a common faith (doctrine) that results in common practices –there is therefore accountability within the formal membership for learning the common faith and living the common practices (James 1:22).

“⁴ There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ One Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ One God and Father of all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

“⁹ Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (II John 9-10).

Water baptism connects a believer to the maintenance of the internal purity of his local church by maintaining a formal membership through Congregational Government in the careful selection of organized and Scriptural officers. It is the responsibility of individuals within local church membership to examine the Scriptural qualifications of those they are considering for spiritual leadership in a local church. Therefore, the formal membership of a local church must be taught these qualifications and be able to be discerning regarding the individuals being considered.

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).

“¹ This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. ² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; ³ Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; ⁴ One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in

subjection with all gravity; ⁵ (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) ⁶ Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. ⁸ Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; ⁹ Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. ¹⁰ And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. ¹¹ Even so *must their* wives *be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. ¹² Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. ¹³ For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (I Timothy 3:1-13).

Water baptism connects a believer to the maintenance of the internal purity of his local church by maintaining a formal membership through Congregational Government in accountability of each individual local church member to be involved in aggressive and bold evangelistic outreach. Many local churches are very definitive about what is moral turpitude. However, they become very lax regarding faithfulness to the missional purpose of their local church – their own church attendance, their own personal discipleship, and their own efforts in evangelistic outreach.

“¹⁸ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ 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” (Matthew 28:18-20).

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in the Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“¹ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³ For I delivered unto {*in the sense of giving something that carries with that giving the responsibility of giving it to others with the same responsibility*} you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died

for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: ⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. ⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. ¹¹ Therefore whether *it were* I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed” (I Corinthians 15:1-11).

Water baptism connects a believer to the maintenance of the internal purity of his local church by maintaining a formal membership through Congregational Government as exemplified in the accountability of each individual local church member in active involvement in the regular assemblies during public times. Unfaithfulness to the assemblies of your local church is unfaithfulness to Christ and manifests disregard for the moral responsibilities testified to in a water baptism decision. Congregation Government does not allow mere *lip service* to attendance to the times of assembly.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart in the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).

“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (I Corinthians 16:2).