

THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM (Part Four)
"Baptismal Regeneration Texts Examined"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16)

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27)

There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (I Peter 3:21)

INTRODUCTION:

After defining and illustrating the usage of symbolism in the first message, we set forth the two contrasting views concerning the nature and usage of water baptism in the New Testament. They are:

(1) The view that baptism is a symbol of a deeper reality, namely the regenerating of new life into a person by the Holy Spirit making them a partaker of the righteousness found in the Gospel of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such regeneration imparts faith and repentance which is then to be confessed outwardly in the waters of baptism. The order is thus, regeneration, faith, repentance, forgiveness then baptism.

(2) The second view is that baptism is a virtuous act in of itself wherein new life is imparted into the person by the water itself. Thus, baptism becomes the reality wherein regeneration occurs. This is known as sacramental grace or baptismal regeneration. Thus the

order becomes, baptism, regeneration, repentance, faith, forgiveness, etc. The two views represent two differing gospels or ways of salvation, and cannot be reconciled.

We now wish to examine the various texts found in the Bible which are used to support the view of baptismal regeneration, and see if they prove the position to be true or not.

I. JOHN 3:5 (NKJV)

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless (except) one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

This statement is made by Jesus to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The debate here hinges upon the meaning of the word, "water." Water may be used either in a literal (physical) or a figurative sense. It may be a physical ritual, or it may be an emblem of symbol of something spiritual. Those who hold to the baptismal regeneration view, say the water refers to the physical water in baptism. They read the statement in this manner: "Except a man receive the sacrament of Christian baptism, and be regenerated by the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This view is false for the following reasons:

1. The word, "baptize" does not occur in the conversation.
2. At the time of the conversation, the sacrament or ordinance of Christian baptism had not yet been instituted and thus could have had no meaning whatever to Nicodemus. The only baptism at the time was that of John's baptism which was of a temporary nature, and was one of repentance in preparation for the appearing of the Messianic kingdom. Christian baptism did not begin until the day of Pentecost.
3. Jesus did not say a thing about baptism, but He did say something about being "born". "Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit." The question then is not, "can a person be saved without a baptism of water," but "can a person be saved without being "born" of water? The Sacramentalist is guilty of changing the words in our Lord's mouth. There is no warrant in the context for using "baptize" and "born" as synonyms. The thing to be explained is regeneration by water, not baptism by water.
4. What then is Jesus saying? He is describing one birth, not two. When He uses water and Spirit, He is using them as synonyms referring to a spiritual birth. He simply makes use of the common practice of repetition, known as a hendiadus (hen-di' a-dis). An hendiadus is a

figure of speech in which two nouns connected by and are used instead of one noun and an adjective. The second noun has the force of an emphatic adjective. Thus water and the spirit signify the same thing. The result is, "except or unless one is born of "spiritual waters," he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

This was something of which Nicodemus should have been familiar since he was rebuked by Jesus for being a master teacher in Israel, and yet did not understand what Jesus was saying. This requires that we go back and familiarize ourselves with what the Old Testament Scriptures had to say about the coming of and entrance into the kingdom of God. This takes us to Ezekiel 36:25-27. There we read that God would raise up a group of spiritual Israelites to be His people, and He would be their God. How could He do this to a wayward and rebellious people? We now read, *"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them."*

The whole context describes how God can produce an obedient people out of a disobedient people; how He can raise up a spiritual Israel within a natural Israel. He does so by regenerating them by His Holy Spirit thus producing within them a new heart which complies with His judgments. Notice that two terms are used to describe this spiritual activity. One: In verse 25, He says, *"I will sprinkle clean waters on you, and you shall be clean."* These waters are not physical, but spiritual, establishing the basis for John 3:5 being translated as "spiritual waters." Two: The second term is found in verse 27 where God says, *"I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes."* This also refers to an internal work by the Spirit within the spiritual or unseen part of man's nature. The sprinkling of "clean waters" and the implantation of God's Spirit are not two separate actions, but one, and describe the new birth of which Jesus is expressing to Nicodemus as taking place through the means of "spiritual waters." Nicodemus should have been familiar with this prophecy and understood its meaning. This would have made sense to Nicodemus. A physical act of baptism would not have made any sense to him since baptism in a Christian setting had not yet been implemented. The baptismal regeneration view cannot be supported by this text.

II. MARK 16:15, 16 NKJV

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved: but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Here we are told by those who hold to the baptismal regeneration view that baptism and regeneration are so closely connected that he who receives the one, receives the other. Thus baptism is essential to salvation and no one goes to heaven without baptism. First we will reply to those who hold to infant regeneration through baptism. One: The text is speaking of believer's baptism, not the baptism of infants who cannot believe. Jesus is describing those who have heard the preaching of the Gospel and believed its message. Two: The word, "believes" precedes the word, "baptize." This implies that faith must precede and is a condition for baptism. The sacramental view holds that baptism precedes faith. Those who believe such cannot appeal to this verse to support their position.

My second reply is to those belonging to the Campbellite group known as the "Church of Christ." The point they make on this verse is that one cannot be saved prior to baptism. They say with emphasis, "The verse does not say you are saved when you believe, but it says you must believe and be baptized before you can be saved."

The questions raised by Jesus are "what is the condition of salvation, and what is the condition of condemnation?"

1. First, What is the condition of salvation? Is it faith plus baptism? Then what would be the fate of a person who had faith without baptism? Examples, thief on the cross, and the Old Testament saints! What was the condition of their salvation? Also, what is the fate of a man who has been baptized while in a state of unbelief? What happens to his regeneration or his supposed coming in contact with the blood of Christ when he is immersed in water?

2. Secondly, I would reply that the Campbellites do not believe what this verse says. They add to it by saying that one who believes and is baptized must hold out faithful to the end in order to be saved. They teach the possibility of the apostasy of a baptized person! That one could believe and be baptized yet fall away and be condemned to hell. The text says "shall or will be saved."

3. Thirdly, baptism is used in the text in connection with faith. Why is this so? If baptism is not that which saves, then what is it for? Baptism is the expected public acknowledgment of Christ as Savior. It is the evidence of the one's faith. The believer goes on to show his faith by good works. A faith that does not work is a false or dead faith (James 2:24). It can just as well be added that in addition to baptism, a believer can be described as one who prays, attends church, observes the Lord's Supper, and does many other works of obedience. But what is the one thing in the text which Jesus says will result in condemnation? He says, "He who

does not believe!"

At what point does a person pass from a state of condemnation into a state of life eternal? John 5:24 gives us the answer. ***"Most assuredly (truly, truly) I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment (condemnation), but has passed (present tense) from death into life."*** The point in time when one passes from death into life occurs at the point when justifying faith occurs. This occurs at the moment of regeneration. True faith is God's gift and works by love which seeks to obey God's commandments. Faith is the evidence of regeneration, and baptism is the evidence of one professing their faith.

4. Fourthly, you will notice that the text speaks of a person who "believes and is baptized." It also speaks of one who "believes not." But it does not have anything to say about the person who "believes but has not yet been baptized." There is an intermediate period of time which occurs between faith in Christ and baptism. Mark 16:16 does not mention this period of time. It has nothing to say about the person who believes but has not yet been baptized. Can we find the answer as to the state or condition of such a person? Yes, in John 3:18. ***"He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already."*** The person who has believed the gospel message and is awaiting baptism is not in a state of condemnation. It is faith which brings about remission of sins, not baptism. Mark 16:16 does not teach infant regeneration or that baptism is essential to be saved from God's condemnation.

III. ACTS 2:38 NKJV

"Then Peter said to them 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

The context of this statement takes place in a setting in which there is a gospel preacher and a large group of gospel hearers, who are Jewish by nature and race. The hearers have been charged with having approved of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ by their leaders, only to be informed that He has risen from the dead and is now their Judge. They have been deeply convicted by this understanding and ask if they can do anything to rectify the situation. They are to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sin. The question focuses on the time element in which forgiveness of sins occurs. Is it at the moment of baptism or prior to baptism?

Since the context addresses those who are of mental development, the text cannot be used to support the belief of infant regeneration, as no infants are involved. In fact, we do not

find any record of the Apostles ever baptizing an infant! So the text cannot be used to support sacramental grace or baptismal regeneration.

We now turn to the Campbellite view which holds the forgiveness of sins occurs the moment one is immersed in water. Campbell states the position this way:

On this side of baptism, and on that, mankind are in quite different states. On the one side they are pardoned, justified, sanctified, reconciled, adopted and saved; on the other they are in a state of condemnation. This act is sometimes called immersion, regeneration, conversion . . . (Campbell, Remission of Sins, p. 12).

He further says,

The only time the word regeneration occurs in the New Testament, with a reference to a personal change, it means, or is equivalent to, immersion. Regeneration and immersion, are therefore, two names for the same thing. . . As regeneration is taught to be equivalent to "being born again," and understood to be the same import with a new-birth, we shall examine it under this metaphor. For if immersion be equivalent to regeneration, and regeneration be of the same import with being born again, then being born again, and being immersed are the same thing. (Campbell, Remission of Sins, p. 29).

This is helpful in understanding why the Campbellite position can be called baptismal regeneration. It is at the point of the immersion of a believer in water that the Christian life is said to begin. All are in a state of condemnation who have not been baptized. Campbell goes on to describe the baptism of the early Christians in these words,

I am bold, therefore, to affirm, that every one of them who, in the belief of what the apostle spoke, was immersed, did, in the very instant in which he was put under water, receive the forgiveness of his sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. If so, then, who will not concur with me in saying, that Christian immersion is The Gospel In Water? (Campbell, Rice Debate, p. 497).

The Campbellites are so confident that this verse teaches their baptismal regeneration view that they at times call their gospel, "The Acts 2:38 Gospel!" It is reported that Campbell and others of their group would often say, "Give me an axe and two 38's and I'll whip any Baptist preacher in the world."

Their entire argument hinges on the meaning of the preposition "for." The Greek word is *eis* and carries several meanings, of which one is "to, or unto." Thus, the Campbellites tell us

baptism is "unto the remission of sins" or in "order to obtain the remission of sins." This remission follows baptism, it does not precede it. That is the claim, but is it true? No, it is not. The word "eis" has several meanings which include "among, with respect to or a view toward, at or in connection with." The Campbellites do not release this information to their hearers.

One such example of another meaning of "eis" other than "unto" is found in Matthew 12:41 where we read that the **"men of Nineveh . . . repented at (eis) the preaching of Jonah."** If the meaning of "eis" is the same as the Campbellite interpretation of Acts 2:38, then Matthew 12:41 would be saying that the Ninevites repented in order to obtain the preaching of Jonah. That was clearly not the case. They repented because they had already received it.

This is the meaning in Acts 2:38. Baptism for (eis) the remission of sins is baptism "at or in connection with" the remission received through repentance and faith. This is the correct view of this verse when compared with the rest of the Bible's teaching on repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Once again, the text does not support the baptismal regeneration view.

I close with the following illustration. In Luke 5:13, 14 we have the account of Christ's healing of a man who had leprosy. We read in the KJV, **"And He put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, 'I will: be thou clean.' And immediately the leprosy departed from him, and He charged him to tell no man; but go, and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing according as Moses commanded for a testimony with them."**

Notice three things:

1. He was healed before he offered a sacrifice.
2. The offering was "for thy cleansing," not in order to obtain it, but to declare in a ceremonial dedication that the cleansing has already occurred.
3. The offering was "for a testimony." Such is the case with every formal, external ordinance. They have no power to do anything else. An ordinance or a sacrament is for a testimony. It does not produce any actual blessing. Ordinances or ceremonies show forth what it is they are meant to show. They are a symbol of a deeper reality.

Thus baptism is such an ordinance and ceremony showing forth that it is in the death of Christ that we have the actual forgiveness of sins. Baptism is "for the remission of sins" only in the sense of a "testimony" pointing to or referring to the death of Christ, just as the lepers offering was "for thy cleansing" in the sense of a testimony.

The Symbolism of Baptism

6 Lessons

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I plan to cover the remaining texts in our next message. I hope you see the error of baptismal regeneration and where it leads to.