

Baptism

For the Remission of Sins.

With a Letter from a Member
of The "Church of Christ,"
and its Answer.

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Baptism for the Remission of Sins

Or, The Baptism of John : What was It ?

WITH A LETTER

FROM A MEMBER OF THE "CHURCH OF CHRIST,"
AND A REPLY TO IT.

LET us read Matthew iii. 1, 2: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then in vv. 5 and 6: "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins." Turn next to Luke iii. 3: "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance, unto the remission of sins." (R.V.) Here John's baptism is called "the baptism of *repentance*." (The word rendered "repentance" means a change of mind, or "to have another mind.") I desire to point out from God's Word how forgiveness of sins was connected with John's baptism, and how that baptism differs from the baptism of believers in this present dispensation, in which it always follows the forgiveness of sins.

In order to understand John's baptism aright, we must go back to Exodus, chap. xix. In that chapter God tells Israel what He had done for His people Israel: how He had brought them "unto Himself." Up till then, all had been done for them upon the ground of grace: **nothing** was contingent upon

their obedience. It was well that it was so. But this chapter tells how willingly they put themselves on a different ground of blessing. In ver. 5, God says, "If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me," etc. Had Israel known themselves, they would have prayed that God might continue to deal with them in grace, as He had up till then been dealing with them. But they answer: "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do" (ver. 8). Again, in chap. xxiv. 7: "All that the Lord hath said, we will do, and be obedient." How was this vow fulfilled? Before Moses returned from the Mount with the Law, they are found dancing around the Golden Calf. This, and all their after-course, only proves how impossible it was to maintain the ground they took up so quickly. After all the centuries of testing, which only serve to expose their failure, the forerunner, John, comes. His "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," tells of blessing on a surer basis than the creature's obedience. But they must give up their chosen ground. So his baptism was a confession that they were taking the place of the guilty, accepting the sentence of God against themselves, by those who submitted to it. How suited to such a baptism was Jordan, "the River of Judgment." As they went into the waters of that river, confessing their sins, the sin of breaking God's holy law, which they had undertaken to keep, it was as if they said, "O God, just as the waters of Jordan flow over us, so Thy wrath ought to overwhelm us, for we have sinned." Luke vii. 29, 30, fully confirms this: "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John"; that is, they justified God as the criminal does the Judge, when he owns that the sentence is just.

See who refused to do this. "But the *Pharisees* and *lawyers* rejected the counsel of God against

themselves, being not baptized of him." They perceived its meaning, but nothing was further from their hearts than to own that *they* were law-breakers, and deserved only judgment. And like many now, who will not take the place where God can bless them, the place of the guilty and the lost, they rejected God's counsels of mercy. There was no "change of mind," no abandonment of the legal ground they had taken up at Sinai. So grace could not reach them.

Why, it may be asked, was the Lord baptized with the baptism of John?—He, the Sinless One, who was so soon to go under the waters of Judgment for the sins of others. His baptism pictures that. As in that baptism in Jordan we see the waters close over Him, we behold in type what we read in prophecy: "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Psa. xlii. 7). And as He comes up out of that river, the heavens open, and the Father's voice testifies to His joy in His beloved Son. And the gift of the Spirit adds the glory of resurrection to that picture of death and judgment.

The Baptism of the Jews

On the Day of Pentecost.

In Acts ii. 38, Peter preaches to the Jewish people: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Two things strike one in reading this passage: the resemblance it bears to John's baptism, and the contrast it presents to baptism as taught by Paul. It was the message of God for the Jew then, but its frequent use now by some, only serves to deceive souls. And this is Satan's object in using truth out of its proper dispensation. Israel was then publicly owned of God as still in covenant relationship with Himself. Although they had

rejected their King, nailed Him to the tree as a blasphemer, God, in His governmental dealings with them, will make them own that rejected One in baptism ere they enter into the blessings His death has procured for them. Here all is in striking contrast to what we read of the first preaching of the Gospel to

The Gentiles,

as we learn by comparing Acts ii. 38, 41, with Acts x. 44. Cornelius and his friends receive the Holy Ghost while Peter is still speaking, and in ver. 47 this is given as their title to baptism, whereas in ii. 38, the Jew could not get the Holy Ghost until he was baptized. Again, in chap. xvi. 30, the Gentile jailor asks a question very similar to that of the Jews in chap. ii. 37; but the answer is entirely different. Nothing is said about baptism, but after he and his household had believed, they rejoiced to obey the Lord in being baptized. To connect the forgiveness of sins in any manner of measure with baptism now, is to obscure the Gospel of Christ and fail to enter into the true meaning of Christian baptism as set forth in the Word.

Paul Washing Away His Sins in Baptism.

In Acts xxii. 16, we read: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This verse has been used to prove that forgiveness of sins is connected with baptism. The allusion is to Deut. xxi. 1-9. The elders of the city next unto the slain man washed their hands over the heifer that was killed in sacrifice, and said, "Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it," etc. The slain man here speaks of Christ, as cast out

and slain by the people of Israel. Paul, by baptism in the Name of that rejected One, figuratively washes his hands of that awful sin. Pilate tried to do this, but for him it was a vain show (Matt. xxvii. 24), while at the same time the Jews accepted the dreadful responsibility of Christ's death, in the words, "His blood be on us and on our children." Paul here does what his fellow countrymen did on the day of Pentecost, when Peter said, "*save yourselves* from this untoward generation" (Acts ii. 40), and they were "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," thus in a very solemn way disassociating themselves from the nation's guilt, as if they repeated Pilate's act, but to real purpose.

The blood of Christ alone could put away sin from before God. It alone can purge the sinner's conscience, then or now, as the blood of the heifer in Deut. xxi. met the claims of God in regard to the sin of murder. This aspect of baptism was peculiar to the Jew.

Saved by Baptism

(I Pet. iii. 21): "The like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (R.V.). The point here is, that the Ark in the deluge, and baptism are corresponding figures. In ver. 20, we read, "Wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water." It was exposed to the deluge, and it bore safely to the top of Mount Ararat all who were in it. In Luke xii. 50, the Lord, speaking of the cross, says: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." When He went through the judgment of God for sin, all who believe passed through it with Him, and in His resurrection they are now beyond judgment. It is *His* baptism on

the cross which saves; water baptism, in which the believer owns the Lordship of Christ, is but the shadow of what Christ passed through for him. And it is the "request" (not answer) of a "good conscience," which only a saved one has—a conscience purged through the blood of Christ. "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" was the question of a newly saved sinner whose conscience was purged by the blood of Christ (Acts viii. 38), and but for the unscriptural teaching absorbed before conversion, we believe the question of the Eunuch would be asked by almost all on accepting Christ as their Saviour, and it would follow immediately on conversion now, as it did in the early days.

Letter

From a Member of the "Church of Christ."

NORTH ADELAIDE,

May 28th, 1908.

DEAR BROTHER IN THE LORD,

First of all, I wish to thank you for the help you have given me in your Lectures on the Second Coming of the Lord, and the truths connected therewith. Although I am not as clear yet on this subject as I would like to be, your explanations have given me much light and have removed many difficulties. The benefit has been all the greater to me, as these subjects are almost universally ignored or neglected among those with whom I am connected: hence I feel all the more thankful to you for your clear explanation and instruction. Though I have at various times read and heard different

views, I could never accept such as being satisfactory and in harmony with the Scriptures. I thank the Lord that He has led you here, and that it has been my privilege to hear you.

But at the same time I feel it to be a duty, dear brother, to express my conviction that you are not giving Baptism the proper position and that you are not in harmony with the mind and will of the Lord in your teaching on this subject. Your statements made last Lord's Day when dealing with "The Gospel" appear to me to be positively harmful and contrary to the plain teaching of God's Word. Knowing your deep reverence for the Scriptures, I feel sure you will pardon me if I point out to you some of these points, in which I believe your teaching to be contrary to the will of God.

From what I have gathered at various times, I think your views on this subject are as follows:

1. There is no connection whatever between Salvation and Christian Baptism.

2. The ordinance is without significance excepting as an act of obedience to the believer, whose standing before God is not effected by his baptism.

3. There are two Gospels: one to the circumcision, the other to the uncircumcision. Both proclaim the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus; but the one, which was preached by Peter to the Jews, has as one of its conditions baptism for the remission of sins, and the other, which was preached by Paul to the Gentiles, is without this condition of baptism.

4. The new birth takes place without baptism, and the passage John iii. 5, which is so often quoted, has no reference to the ordinance. The word "water" in this passage has the same meaning as it has in John iv. 14 and vii. 38, and has reference to the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit.

As to the first point, will you allow me to draw your attention to the fact that the Saviour Himself does link salvation and baptism together when in Mark xvi. 16, He says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." I do not by making this reference imply that no one who is not baptized can be saved; all I want to do is to show that the Saviour has seen fit to connect the two, and what the Lord has joined together, I would not dare to put asunder.

As I am not quite certain if I have correctly stated your views in paragraph two, I will not enter upon this now, but will later on give my own views upon this point.

As to the third view, that there are certain conditions in the Gospel for the Jews, which as far as baptism is concerned do not apply to the Gentiles, this is a statement for which I can find no justification in the Word. You quote Gal. ii. 7 in support of such view; but does not ver. 9 explain ver. 7, and show that the only difference was to be found in the field of operation, in that Peter was to labour with Israel, and Paul in the Gentile world, without any suggestion that the Gospel they preached was in any way different? The whole teaching of the Book of Acts, as well as of the Epistles, makes this evident. Paul, notwithstanding his words, "The Lord has not sent me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel," attaches so much importance to baptism, that in nearly all his letters he speaks of the ordinance, magnifying it as much as Peter would have done. To Paul, the ordinance has far greater significance than you have attached to it in your Addresses.

As to the meaning of the word "water" in John iii. 5, mentioned in paragraph four, your remark was: "If 'water' in John iv. 14 and in John vii. 38, means the Holy Spirit, by what right dare anyone say it means anything else in John iii. 5?" My

answer to this is, that if your contention is correct, and that it does mean the Holy Spirit, then the Saviour's words to Nicodemus really are: "Except a man be born of the Spirit and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." I feel sure you would not contend for this, hence "water" in John iii. 5, must mean literal water, and must have some reference to baptism.

I will now deal with the point raised in paragraph two, and will do so by stating what I believe to be the significance of baptism. It is on this point that we separate, and if such were not the case, we could be in closest fellowship in the Lord, as far as I am able to judge.

I want to start by saying, that we are misunderstood or misrepresented when the statement is made that we hold there is any merit in baptism, or that we claim that baptism procures salvation. We hold there is not, and cannot be any merit in anything that man can do, and that all merit is found in the finished atonement made by the Lord Jesus. In this, both you and I are agreed. But at the same time it appears to me, from the clear and definite teaching of the Scriptures, that Baptism is the divinely appointed place at which, and the divinely appointed time in which, God does bestow the blessings which Christ has procured for His people. Baptism appears to me to be the marriage ceremony, in which the sinner and the Saviour become united, and by which the sinner participates in the merit of the Lord and in all which flows from His source. That this is so, seems to be clearly taught in the following passages:

Gal. iii. 27—"As many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ." The conclusion from these words is unavoidable: that those who have not been baptized have not yet put on Christ. This may be, though they believe in Him and love

Him and seek to serve Him. I am not overlooking the teaching of Rom. xiii. 14, where the Apostle exhorts the Romans to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." In baptism, there is a first putting on of Him from whom we have been separated, and here is taught a continual putting on and becoming followers of Him.

Colossians ii. 12—"Having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye also were raised with Him, through faith in the working of God." If there is any sense at all in language, we cannot avoid the conclusion that those who are not baptized have not been buried with Christ, nor have they been raised with Him.

Romans vi. 3—"We who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death." The first thought here is, that baptism brings the sinner who was out of Christ, now *into* Christ, and also that a relationship to the death of Christ begins, which did not exist previously.

These passages, to which others could be added, teach in unmistakable language that there is a very important significance attached to the ordinance: the standing of the sinner before God is changed, and blessings are conveyed thereby. Not that any such blessings are *procured* by baptism, but that they are *secured* thereby. And it is our own Divine Lord and God Himself who has connected the blessing with the command.

I would also point out that the three passages quoted were written by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, to the churches at Rome, Galatia, and Colosse, which did not consist of Jews, but of Gentiles. Does not this dismiss the argument that there was a special Gospel to the uncircumcision, in which the condition of baptism does not apply?

I do not write with a view of entering upon a controversy, but I feel it to be my duty to state my

conviction that you are not giving this divinely instituted ordinance the place which is assigned thereto in the Scriptures.

Your reverence for the Word of God will prompt you to give this the consideration which is due to it, and I leave the matter in your own hands. I wish you to receive these remarks in the same brotherly spirit in which they have been written by me.

Again thanking you for the help you have given me,

I remain,

Yours in Him who loveth us,

Answer to the above Letter.

WOODVILLE,

June 8, 1908.

DEAR MR. _____,

Yours of the 28th ult. was duly received. Thank you for the many appreciative things you say as to help received in the meetings.

Now as to the subject of your letter. It is not my intention to notice all the points your letter raises on the subject of Baptism, but only some of the principal ones, also to put my own position more clearly before you.

You deplore the lack of interest on the part of those with whom you are in fellowship, in the truth of the Lord's coming and related events. Let me say that a lack of knowledge of Dispensational Truth is responsible for some wrong views on Baptism. You may know that Adventists, Christadelphians, and Mormons, with some others, hold

“Baptism for the remission of sins,” which is a truth out of its proper dispensation, therefore wrong and contrary to God’s mind. Distinguish the dispensations, and you will be better able to understand how Baptism should be regarded now.

I presume you have kept a copy of your letter to me, so I won’t burden this letter with full quotations from it. Now as to your four paragraphs.

No. 1.—This expresses my position fairly well. Baptism has “no connection” with Salvation, save that it should follow conversion in every case.

No. 2.—You are astray in thinking that I regard Baptism as “without significance excepting as an act of obedience of the believer.” I regret that for too many that is all I fear it is. But while it does not affect our standing, there is a wondrous wealth of teaching in Baptism, and God would edify our hearts by it.

No. 3.—Here you would better present what I apprehend to be the truth by putting it, “There *were* [not are] two Gospels.” God now makes no difference between Jew and Gentile. And only one Gospel—“the Gospel of the grace of God,” or “the Gospel of the Uncircumcision”—should be preached. I say “should be,” for many preach—perhaps unwittingly—“the Gospel of the Circumcision.” Your remarks on this paragraph reveal a loose way of reading God’s Word which is, alas, too common. Surely when the Spirit of God speaks of “the Gospel *of* the Circumcision” and “the Gospel *of* Uncircumcision,” He does not mean simply the Gospel *to* the Circumcision and *to* the Uncircumcision. It is the character of the message, more than the field of operation, which is in His mind. Acts ii. 37-40, gives the Gospel of the Circumcision. The question is asked by the Jews: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” The answer is: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins,” etc.

Acts xvi. 30-34, gives us the Gospel of the Uncircumcision, to the Gentiles. The jailor's question is similar to the other: "What must I do to be saved?" Mark the answer now: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," etc. And baptism follows in his case. As you rightly understood me to say, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is the ground of blessing for sinners in all dispensations.

No. 4.—Here you have missed just what I did say. You are right in understanding me to teach, "The new birth takes place without baptism, and the passage John iii. 5, has no reference to the ordinance." But when you go on to make me say, "The word 'water' in this passage has the same meaning it has in John iv. 14 and vii. 38, and has reference to the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit," you are astray. What I did say was that in John iii. 5, water is a figure of the Word of God; in iv. 14, of Divine Life; and in vii. 38, of the Holy Spirit. In proof that water is a symbol of the Word, Eph. v. 26 was read; and in proof that the Word of God—not literal water—is used to produce the new birth, I read Jas. i. 18: "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth"; and I Pet. i. 23: "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

I am quite unable to reconcile the following words in your letter: "We are misunderstood or misrepresented when the statement is made that we hold there is any merit in baptism, or that we claim that baptism procures salvation," with those which occur in the very same paragraph, "Baptism is the divinely appointed place AT which, and the divinely appointed time IN which, God does bestow the blessings which Christ has procured for His people. Baptism appears to me to be the marriage ceremony, in which the sinner and the Saviour

become united, and by which the sinner participates in the merits of the Lord, and in all which flows from His source." What more could anyone claim for Baptism than you claim in these words? And I fail to see according to this that you are "misrepresented."

It is clear, Paul did not share your views as to the place Baptism occupies in the salvation of the sinner. In I Cor. iv. 15, he says, "I have begotten you through the Gospel." Yet when, in chap. xv. 1-8, he gives an inspired declaration (ver. 1) of "the Gospel," he does not mention Baptism. Again, he says in 2 Cor. xi. 2, "I have espoused you unto one husband . . . to Christ." Yet in I Cor. i. 14, we hear him say, "I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius"; in ver. 16, "I baptized also the household of Stephanas, besides I know not whether I baptized any other." Most unaccountable language, if Baptism is the "marriage ceremony" and "the divinely appointed" time and place for the sinner becoming united to Christ! And lest the peculiar state of the assembly at Corinth is put forward as the one reason for his words, he goes right back to his commission and tells in ver. 17, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel," thus drawing a clear distinction between the two things. If your position were right, Paul would be saying in effect, "Christ sent me not to bring sinners into union with Himself." But Paul is speaking of the Gospel he received from Christ (see Gal. i. 11, 12), and in Gal. ii. 7, you have it in contrast with what Peter preached. Paul was the chosen vessel to bring out the truth peculiar to this dispensation. Israel, for the time, being set aside, the only Gospel which should be preached, is what Paul speaks of as "my Gospel" (2 Tim. ii. 8). Speaking on Gal. iii. 27, you say, "The conclusion from these words is unavoidable, that those who have not been bap-

tized have not yet put on Christ, but are as yet out of Christ." Again, from Col. ii. 12, "We cannot avoid the conclusion that those who are not baptized have not been buried with Christ, nor have been raised with Him." It is because you confound the act of the believer, one who is truly born of God, in owning by his figurative burial in Baptism, that he has died and been raised with Christ, with the reality which is true of all believers baptized and unbaptized, that you arrive at your "unavoidable conclusion." Your conclusion is opposed to both Scripture and experience. Among those who have not seen the truth of "Immersion," whom you say "have not put on Christ, and are yet out of Christ," Christ is seen in their daily walk: this is putting on Christ. They are walking apart from this "evil world," are heavenly minded, have a savour of Christ: that is living out in practice what our baptism sets forth. On the other hand, you feel yourself, among those who do believe and practice Immersion, the lack of interest in truth which you love. They have no heart for it. One cannot but be impressed with the worldliness of the mass who believe Baptism does so much. They are just like professors of other views.

Now a word, ere I close this letter. Baptism has its Divine place in this dispensation. It is the act of a child of God, an act of obedience, full of very precious teaching, but it is not connected with our standing. Take as an illustration I Cor. x. 2. Of Israel we read, they "were all baptized unto [or into] Moses in the cloud and in the sea." They had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. Now, at the very beginning of their wilderness journey, they are identified with Moses in this figurative Baptism, as their God-given leader whom they are to obey. So Rom. vi. 3-5, is the act of those who are justified, have peace with God, are under shelter of the blood. They at the beginning of their

Christian course are baptized unto (or into) Christ Jesus (R.V.) the risen One, as their Divine Leader. The act is a profession that we own Him who has been our Saviour, now as our Lord, to obey Him in all things. Israel's failures and defeats were the result of not really being subject to Moses. If God's people now were to give Christ in their everyday life the place we profess to give Him in Baptism, it would be constant victory.

Now let me assure you, in closing, I desire your spiritual profit. If I have helped you to get a better hold of other truths, accept this as an earnest effort to help you in this truth, and read it carefully and prayerfully.

Hoping God will bless you,

I am your servant, for Jesus' sake,

W. J. MCCLURE.

