

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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CONCERNING BAPTISM

It was in 1930 that many circumstances convinced me that it was my duty to God to make an objective study of the subject of baptism. I was then the pastor of a Baptist Church and was quite dissatisfied with the attitude of the members toward this ordinance. They were strongly inclined to regard all who had been baptized as Christians and all who had not been as unsaved and lost. My messages to them insisted that one became a believer by believing and not by being baptized. I charged them with making far too much of baptism in the wrong way, giving it saving and cleansing powers that should be attributed only to the Lord Jesus Christ. This angered some since their entire hope was in their baptism and church membership.

In addition to this I was somewhat exercised about my own personal relationship to this ceremony, having become a church member by baptism at the age of twelve, then finding and believing in Jesus Christ as my Savior at the age of eighteen. This was baptism before salvation. Some members of the church seized upon this irregularity and were belaboring me concerning it. This problem was easily adjusted by rebaptism, an act that caused many to ask about their own relationship to this ordinance. "If you should, then we should," was their words to me. This I could not refute, so about forty, my own wife included, were baptized by immersion. We were all happy about this, and I decided to make a painstaking study of all the Bible had to say about baptism.

However, the one incident that brought all this turmoil to a head still stands out in my mind, even though fifty years later the details are not as clear I would like for them to be. A young husband had taken seriously and dangerously ill and needed to go the hospital for a major operation. His wife sent for me and I dealt with him concerning his need of a Savior and set forth Jesus Christ as the Savior he needed. He was receptive to the truth and confessed to his wife and myself his faith in and the acceptance of the Lord Jesus as his Savior.

I narrated all this to the congregation on Sunday morning, and, inasmuch as he was to enter the hospital that afternoon, he was received as a candidate for baptism, this to be done upon his recovery. This involved me in some very stringent criticism upon the part of some. It was evident that they believed that if he died unbaptized he would be lost. This I considered to be contrary to the truth of God's Word, also contrary to Baptist teaching and principles.

At this time all my views on baptism were hand-me-downs, so I determined to go to the Word of God for myself in order to have firsthand, Biblical truth on the subject. I felt quite sure that all my views would be justified, but my first findings were quite a shock to me. This was so much so that I dropped my penetrating studies for a time in order to absorb and sort out what I had already found. The subject was constantly on my mind and this was forcing a revolution in my thinking.

A change in my field of labors brought me to the Chicago area. Here I found a very heated controversy raging on the subject of baptism. I became involved in this, but soon felt that more heat than light was being generated in the arguments being presented *pro* and *con* by John C. O'Hair, Harry A. Ironside, and William McCarrell. I knew all these men and conferred with them at length. I resumed my studies with renewed intensity and soon concluded that "baptism" was far more important than I had made it to be, and that this importance could not possibly be related to the water ritual. The question I now faced was could it be that the word "baptism" denotes a number of ideas or concepts and is used to set forth a number of truths in the Word of God? The answer to this had to be in the affirmative. I knew quite well that the two occurrences of "baptize" in Matthew 3: 11 had to set forth two different concepts. And there were occurrences in other passages where it could not possibly denote the same ideas that it does in Matt. 3: II. It then became my task to discover all the many concepts which are described by this word and decide which one is the most transcendent, the "**one baptism**" of Ephesians 4:5.

At this point the reader is asked to remember that in all languages most words are used to signify a number of concepts and to express numerous ideas. Since words are employed this way, we cannot arbitrarily relate them to a single meaning. We must, from a due consideration of the context, give it the meaning it was intended to convey. For example, when we come upon the word *gold* we all know that it means a metallic element found in the earth. But is that what it means when someone says "He has a heart of *gold*." Each time we come upon a word we must determine from its context what idea or concept it is intended to convey.

In 1935, at the urging of many who knew that I was assiduously studying the subject, I wrote and put into print a pamphlet under the title of *The Glory of The One*

Baptism setting forth the results of my studies up to that time. This was a rather crude presentation but it was the best I could do then. However, in the forty-five years that have passed, I have never ceased to search for additional truth on this subject. This search has been fruitful, and what I have found will now be epitomized and set forth in a series of short, easy-to read leaflets.

There has long been an idolatrous attachment to the water ritual that is called baptism. The exaltation of this ceremony grows constantly. It is being given preeminence over all things that are called Christian. Millions are finding their completeness in this ritual. "My three children were baptized last Sunday so now we are all safe in the church," were the words of a mother's letter to me. Baptism is being praised and exalted with every kind of an accolade that men can imagine.

The following statements have been culled from the writings of men who profess to be teachers of God's Word. They say water baptism is a seal of believers; it is the final step that puts us into the kingdom of God; it takes the place of circumcision; it is a witness to unbelievers; it is a confession of our faith in Christ; it is a picture of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ; it is the door of entrance into the visible church; it is the initiatory ordinance of Christianity; it is the putting on of the uniform of a Christian; that by it we are identified with a rejected Christ; that it is a burial with Christ; that it is a means of grace; that it brings you under God's covenanted mercy; etc. etc.

These are just a few of the words of acclaim that are spoken concerning water baptism. Such words as these are nothing more than human opinions. All of them are devoid of a single hint of support from the Word of God. They are the products of man's reasoning made in order to exalt a ritual. By such words water baptism is being given a glory that belongs only to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is evident that many ministers today are assuming the stance that this practice is a divine ordinance, decreed by Jesus Christ, and that He intended it to be a binding obligation upon all who profess relationship to Him. If this be so, why then did Paul say: "**Christ sent (apostello) commissioned) me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel**" (1 Cor. 1: 17).

Ancient controversies concerning baptism have become active again. During the past several years these have erupted as regularly as Mount St. Helens. Dr. Jurgen Moltman, of Germany's *Tubingen University*, a Lutheran, and Dr. Paul K. Jewett of *Fuller Theological Seminary* have leveled strong attacks against the practice of infant baptism. Both of these men repudiate the idea that baptism as the initiatory rite of Christianity is parallel with circumcision as practiced in Israel. The writings of these two have created a major stir.

At this point in our study I do not hesitate to say that the entire idea of the necessity for some kind of a water ritual to be performed as an initiatory rite at the beginning of one's relationship to Jesus Christ is an unscriptural theory held by millions who have done nothing more than to receive without question a practice that was handed down to them by others. Then having received from others this practice as being a command from God, they now see their water ritual in every passage where such words as baptism, washing, cleansing, water, or sprinkling are found. Even J .C. Ryle, an excellent teacher who both believed in and practiced a water ritual, found it necessary to speak strong words of rebuke against those who dragged this ritual in everywhere and saw it in every place possible in the Word of God.

In approaching our subject, I would like to use an illustration from my own experience that shows how blind one can be as to the multiple meaning of words. As a small boy the word *excelsior* came into my vocabulary, and to me it meant nothing more than a material made of curled shreds of wood used for stuffing and as a protective padding. I remember the shock that was mine when my high school class considered adopting as its motto the word "Excelsior." This was repugnant to me, until I was informed that "excelsior" also meant "more lofty, still higher, ever upward."

Even so it is with the average person in regard to the word "baptism." When they hear this word it means only one thing to them – a religious ritual or ceremony performed by a minister in which a person is dipped into water or has water sprinkled or poured upon him. This is the idea that comes into their minds every time they come upon this word in the Bible. They easily gloss over a passage such as Matt. 3: 11 where three baptisms are set forth: baptism in water, baptism in Spirit, and baptism in fire. It does injustice to the Word of God and to His truth if we read into His word the idea of a water ceremony every time we came upon the word "baptism." One of the first facts that must be acknowledged by all who would make an honest study of this subject is that the words "baptize" and "baptism" have not been translated. They are, as Kenneth S. Wuest declares, "not native to the English language." They are untranslated Greek words carried over into English by dropping the o from *baptizo* and substituting the English letter *e*. In producing the word *baptism* they simply cut off the last letter from *baptisma*. Therefore, these words must be studied as Greek words, not as English, and their true historical and grammatical meaning must be sought out if God's truth is our goal.

Therefore, God's truth concerning baptism is the goal of this study. And as we consider let us remember the words of Elihu: "**For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat. Let us choose to use judgment; let us know among ourselves what is good.**" Job 34:3.

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