

The Doctrine of Baptism

As we continue this series on how the church has become divided I want to look at the doctrine of baptism. There are considerable differences with regard to this doctrine in many ways. Since every church thinks they're right in the matter this is a point of great division within the church.

Let's start from the beginning. There is division about when a person should be baptized. Some churches teach that children of believers should be baptized. They can look to Scriptures such as Acts 16:14-15 to justify this belief. This Scripture says:

- (14) And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.
- (15) And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide *there*. And she constrained us.

It would appear based solely on this Scripture that Lydia's household was baptized without regard to their giving profession of faith in Christ. On the other hand, we can look at the example of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Verses 36-39 says:

- (36) And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?
- (37) And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- (38) And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.
- (39) And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

If we look at Philip's criteria then baptism is reserved only for those who have believed. Quite a difference here.

Another big division in the church about baptism comes with the purpose of baptism itself. There are two primary views of this and a third that I have heard of which I think to be a minority view. First, there is the belief that water baptism is necessary for salvation. They use Scripture such as Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:21 to justify this belief. They even use John 3:5. Now I think this is clearly a case of looking at particular Scriptures out of context. Let's look at each of these Scriptures briefly, beginning with John 3:5 (I'm going to look at verse 6 also). This Scripture says:

- (5) Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
- (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

You see, if you read only verse five it would could be argued that water baptism is necessary for salvation. Verse 6, though, explains that the birth of water is the fleshly birth and the birth of the Spirit is a spiritual birth – this is just an explanation of the two births. In Acts 2:38 Peter says, “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.” From this we could say that baptism is required for salvation. If that’s so, though, Paul lied to the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:33 when he said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Then if we really look at 1 Peter 3:21 we see that it’s not referring to water baptism. In order to understand this we need to understand that the word baptize literally means to wash. 1 Peter 3:21 says, “The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” If we look at the parenthetical expression then we see that it’s not talking about water baptism at all, its about the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

The other major belief is that baptism is to be conducted to give an outward sign of an inward change. It is noted that in most examples given water baptism comes after believing, and in virtually every case where people have believed they are baptized. Some examples of this are the Ethiopian eunuch and the Phillipian jailor that I mentioned earlier.

The third view that I want to mention is that baptism should not have been part of the church. It is claimed that the disciples did this because John had baptized. They go to Scriptures such as John 4:2, which says, “Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,” to back up this claim. I think that this is clearly a false teaching since Jesus himself said to baptize as part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

Next there is much dissension in the Church over the mode with which baptism is to be administered. Many churches insist that baptism means to immerse. They fail to recognize that it really means to wash and is used for things which are not normally immersed to wash in Mark 7. They also fail to recognize that the baptism with the Holy Ghost is referred to as the pouring of the Spirit. Finally, in Ezekiel 36:25 God talks about cleansing people by sprinkling. It’s not entirely clear then which method of baptism is right, but there are many churches which condemn methods other than what they use.

In conclusion today I want to ask you to just stop and think about how division in the Church has developed by looking at only some verses, and often this division is over things which are not primary to the gospel. It’s time that we get back to the Word. In our next lesson I want to look at the fact that there’s even disagreement over the Church itself.

Yours in Christ,

Bro. John Rich