

A Believer's Bible Booklet



Believer's Baptism

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

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There are few subjects more controversial, more divisive or more abused in Christendom today than the doctrine of baptism.

By many Christians baptism is relegated to a place of virtual insignificance. By others it is totally ignored as a non-essential. By still others it is regarded as the entrance into church membership. Some esteem it to be an indispensable condition for one's salvation.

But what do the scriptures teach?

The first thing which can be assuredly asserted from the Word of God is that it is a command of the Lord. This is

The Basis For Baptism

To His small band of faithful followers the resurrected Christ, just prior to His ascension, said:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, Therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matt. 28:18-20

Here is a solemn responsibility for the apostles, and, after them, the Bible teachers and elders of the church. It is their responsibility to baptize those who have become followers of Jesus Christ. The "Great Commission" is not to evangelize. It is to "make disciples." How is this done? The process begins with evangelism which leads to conversion. Those converted are to be baptized and indoctrinated. The commission requires the teaching of baptism to the new converts and suggests that discipling is not complete without baptism. The practice of baptizing others, then, is based directly on the command of our Lord.

Here is an ordinance for the Christian church. If an ordinance is simply a ritual or a rite prescribed by our Lord, practiced in the early church, and expounded by the apostles in the epistles of the New Testament, then baptism is certainly an ordinance. It was given by our Lord (Matt. 28:18-20) It was widely practiced in the early church (Acts 2:41; 8:36-39; 9:18; 10:47; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5). It was expounded by the apostles in the epistles (Rom. 6:1-6; 1 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 6:1). The ordinance of baptism, then, is based directly on this command of the Lord.

Here is an obligation for everyone who becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is very difficult to avoid the importance of baptism in the New Testament. If you are concerned about obeying the Lord, if you are concerned about following the New Testament, if you are concerned with living in fellowship with the Lord and pleasing Him, you will be concerned about baptism. It is a command of the Lord.

Who would disagree with F. B. Meyer who once said that the Word of God is not given to be admired for its beauty or studied for its detail; it is given to be obeyed? There is no blessing in hearing and knowing it, apart from doing it. It was our Lord Himself who said,

"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."

John 14:15

The apostle boldly states

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.

1 John 2:4-5

But why? Many reasons for baptism have been suggested and exist today. Let us turn to the single and final authority, the Word of God, to discover

The Purpose of Baptism

Is It the Door to Church Membership?

The answer of the New Testament seems to be "No." According to Acts 2:47 it is personal salvation which places one in the church.

"And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Membership in the universal church is the immediate possession of every individual upon conversion. This is the only aspect of church membership that is ever entertained in the New Testament. That is, one is a member of the local church by virtue of his membership in the universal church. Was the Ethiopian Eunuch joining a church when he was baptized? Surely not. He was by the side of the desert road south of Jerusalem on his way home to Ethiopia (Acts 8). Was the Philippian jailer joining a church when he was baptized? Hardly. He was at his home and it was shortly after midnight (Acts 16). In the New Testament, baptism is always associated with salvation and never with church membership. It was no door into the local church.

Is It the Washing Away of Sins?

There are two verses which seem to suggest this. Recounting the words of Ananias at the time of his conversion, the apostle Paul says:

And now why do you delay? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.

Acts 22:16

Whatever else this verse teaches, it says that the washing away of one's sins is by calling on the name of the Lord - not by baptism. In the Greek text, "arise" is a participle and "be baptized" is an imperative. There is no "and" between "arise" and "be baptized." Literally it is "arising - be baptized." Then comes the second imperative, "wash away your sins" followed by the participle "calling." The pattern in the original text then is participle ("arising"), imperative ("be baptized"), imperative ("wash away") and a participle ("calling"). This pattern clearly associates the first imperative with the first participle ("Arising, be baptized") and the second imperative with the second participle ("wash away your sins" by means of "calling on His name"). There is no indication in this text that baptism washes away sin. Cleansing from sin is associated with calling on the Lord's name. Nor would one who reads the entire New Testament expect baptism to be associated with the washing away of sin. The uniform testimony of scripture is that only the blood of Christ can wash away sin.

"The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

1 John 1:7b

Another verse often used to teach that baptism does wash away our sins and saves us, actually teaches just the opposite.

And corresponding to that (Noah and his family saved through the flood in the ark), baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 Pet. 3:21

Whatever else this verse teaches, it clearly says baptism is "not the removal of dirt from the flesh." It does not wash away sins.

The word which introduces this verse, translated "and corresponding to that," indicates that what Peter is now going to say in verse 21 is somehow parallel to what he has said in verse 20. In that verse he gave an illustration of salvation. In this verse he gives a second illustration of salvation. Here are two figures of salvation.

Peter makes a typical comparison between Noah's ark in the flood and water baptism. As the waters of divine judgment fell upon the ark, so all the waves and billows of God's wrath against sin fell upon Christ on the Cross. Those in the ark were delivered through the judgment and to a new world and life. Those who are "in Christ" through a personal faith in Him are also delivered from judgment and raised to a new life. The incident of Genesis 6-9 is a graphic illustration of our salvation. Peter says Christian baptism is also an illustration of our salvation. It is a figure of death and resurrection (c.f. Rom. 6:1-6). Through union with Christ by personal faith a believer has been raised up to a new life. This is illustrated in baptism as it was in the flood. There is no indication in this scripture or any other that baptism washes away sin.

Is It a Condition for Salvation?

On the radio just last week a "Bible teacher" said, "Baptism gains salvation, endurance gains heaven." Is this true to scripture?

There are certainly several verses which seem to suggest that one must be baptized in order to be saved. The formula becomes:

Believe in Jesus Christ + Be Baptized = Salvation.

The key proof text for such a formula comes from the closing verses of Mark's gospel.

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

Mark 16:15-16

But two things should be kept in mind here.

The authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 is questionable. Some of the oldest and best Greek manuscripts (Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) omit these verses. One who recognizes this will be cautious in using any verse in this section as a proof text.

However, it is even more important to observe that the only pronouncement of condemnation at the end of the verse is upon those who do not believe. What about the one who does believe and is not baptized? Is he condemned? Apparently not. It is often argued that one would not be baptized if he had not believed so the Lord considers only the first condition "believe" in his condemnation clause. He assumes that if one did not believe, he naturally would not be baptized. This, however, is to miss the point. If baptism is equally essential for salvation He must also say, "Even he who has believed but has not been baptized shall be also condemned." He does not say this! He says only that the person who doesn't believe is condemned. This is in harmony with the many texts of the New Testament which place faith as the sole human requirement for salvation. For example:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

John 3:36

When our Lord said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" He was not including baptism as a condition. The last clause makes this clear. Rather He was indicating that baptism was the normal outward confession that was expected to accompany true faith in Christ.

Another favorite text for those who contend that baptism is essential for salvation comes from the address of Peter on the day of Pentecost.

And Peter said to them,

Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;
and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38

But is Peter saying baptism is a prerequisite? Listen to the same Peter on another occasion. This time he is speaking to Cornelius about Jesus Christ and says:

Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.

Acts 10 :43

Here he mentions only believing. There is no reference to baptism. As a matter of fact, please observe that Cornelius and those with him believed, received the Holy Spirit (v. 45), and spoke in tongues (v. 46), before they were baptized (v. 48).

It is clear from Peter's statement in Acts 10:43 and the subsequent experience of those Gentiles that believing is the condition for salvation. Believing is the key thing in Acts 2:38. In the matter of salvation baptism is a non-essential although it is expected to accompany it. Dr. S. L. Johnson says it is like getting your hat to get into your car to go downtown. Getting your hat is a non-essential to going downtown. You may always get your hat when you are going downtown but the essential thing is getting into your car! The essential for salvation is faith. Baptism is often associated with believing in the New Testament - not as an essential for salvation but as the normal confession of it. The New Testament does not entertain the idea of an unbaptized believer.

There remains one further verse to be answered if, indeed, baptism is not a condition for salvation. To Nicodemus Jesus answered,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

John 3:5

Whatever else the "water" here may suggest, it does not and cannot speak of Christian baptism. It was not until after the resurrection of our Lord that Christian baptism was instituted. That event was still three years in the future! If Christian baptism was meant by our Lord it would have been meaningless to Nicodemus who, by the way, became a believer before Christian baptism was ever instituted (John 19:39).

Again, if Christian baptism were meant by our Lord here as a condition for salvation, it is very strange that this is the only time in all John's gospel where it is so stated as a requirement. This is truly remarkable in view of the repeated emphasis on believing as the single condition for salvation (1:12, 3:36,5:24, etc.). Further, it would be surprising to see baptism in this verse when there is a complete detachment in John's gospel from the ordinance of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither is even mentioned in this fourth gospel.

Probably our Lord is referring to John's baptism, which was a baptism of repentance. If so, He is simply telling Nicodemus that the new birth, the spiritual birth into the kingdom of God, is the work of God the Holy Spirit in those who repent.

Recently I was having dinner in a restaurant with a couple who believed baptism was essential for salvation. Curious. I posed a question. "What if someone believed in Jesus Christ personally as their Savior here in this restaurant but was killed in an automobile accident driving to work or even to their church to be baptized? Would he be saved?" To my surprise and delight they both agreed he would be saved because he had had no opportunity to be baptized. When the point was pressed it became clear to them. Baptism is not essential for salvation.

The scriptures declare:

For by GRACE you have been saved through FAITH; and that not of yourselves, it is the GIFT of God; NOT as a result of WORKS, that no one should boast.

Eph. 2:8-9

Again:

Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.

Acts 16:30-31

One of the most decisive texts on this question comes from the pen of Paul who said.

"For Christ did not send me to baptize. but to preach the gospel."

1 Cor. 1:17a

Here the apostle clearly distinguishes between baptism and the gospel! If baptism were essential for salvation no such distinction could ever be made. Although Paul did occasionally baptize persons (v. 14), he generally left this to others while he proclaimed the message of the gospel.

What is the purpose of baptism then? If it is not an entrance to church membership, if it is not a means of washing away sins, if it is not essential for salvation, what is it?

It Is A Confession of Identification with Christ

Identification is the secondary meaning of the Greek verb which was transliterated into English "baptize." This is clear from 1 Corinthians 10:2 where we read that "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea." The events of the Exodus separated the children of Israel from Pharaoh and Egypt unto Moses. They were identified with him, under his leadership.

Identification is the primary meaning of all other forms of baptism in New Testament times. When a proselyte was baptized he was identifying himself with Judaism. In the baptism of John the Baptist an Israelite was identifying himself with John and the repentant remnant who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah. When our Lord was baptized He was identifying Himself with the believing remnant in one sense, with guilty sinners in another sense, and the work of Calvary and redemption in still another sense. When a believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit he is so identified with Christ that he is "in Christ" (Rom. 6:1-6). He is also so identified with the Body of Christ, His Church, that he becomes a member of His Church, a part of His body (1 Cor. 12:13). So CHRISTIAN BAPTISM is an identification. He is identifying himself publicly with Jesus Christ. He is declaring his personal faith in Him. He is acknowledging that he is depending upon Jesus Christ and His death alone for his salvation. He is saying, "I am a believer. I belong to Jesus Christ. I am on His side." In the days of the early church they had no decision cards, no altar calls, no raising of hands. It was by baptism that one identified himself with Christ as a Christian.

Identification is the basic truth expounded in Romans 6. Here the apostle writes:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.

Rom. 6:3-5

It is the baptism by the Holy Spirit that is primarily in view here. By the work of the Holy Spirit the believer is united with Christ. He is identified with Him in His death. This brings to an end his old life positionally. His history as a child of Adam ends. "Old things are passed away." The identification continues to His burial and resurrection. This brings him into a new life. His history as a child of God begins. "Behold, all things are become new."

This is the nature of the identification he is confessing publicly when the believer is baptized in Christian baptism. He is not only declaring his personal faith in Jesus Christ but is also acknowledging that the old Adam nature with its fleshly lusts has been crucified and that he has been raised to live a new life to the glory of God. He is indicating that it is his desire and intention with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life.

Some time ago a young Jewish lawyer in Hartford, Connecticut was converted to Christ in a Missionary Alliance Church. His parents did nothing. Later he married a Gentile Protestant girl. Still his parents did nothing. But then he was baptized by Christian baptism. Immediately his parents disowned him and held a public funeral for their son. It was in his baptism that he had identified himself with Jesus Christ. That is its purpose.

Sometimes it triggers persecution from the enemies of Christ. Often it serves as a springboard into a life of obedience and service. It is a giant step forward. To be sure, it yields a good conscience before the Lord - it is an act of obedience to His command. But every other product is overshadowed by the pleasure such a confession must bring to the heart of our Lord.

One of the most controversial of all the questions on baptism is in regard to the procedure. Should it be by sprinkling, by pouring or by immersion? Again, let us turn to our only authority to discover

The Mode Of Baptism

We believe the New Testament is clear. Every indication is that baptism was administered in the early church by immersion.

The primary meaning of the Greek verb BAPTIZO is "to immerse" or "to dip" (Arndt and Gingrich). In non-Christian literature it also meant "plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm, etc." The Greeks used the verb for the dyeing of a garment in a pot. In secular literature it was used to describe a boat which had been wrecked by being submerged. Without translating it this verb was transliterated in the authorized version "baptize". The reason is transparent. Sprinkling was already in use in Britain and widely accepted. To translate the verb "immerse" would have declared the truth but contradicted the popular practice of the Church of England. The transliteration "baptize" avoided this contradiction.

The renowned Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim describes in detail the baptism of a proselyte to Judaism. It was a baptism by immersion. This was the mode of baptism the early Church knew. What could be more normal than for them to take this mode over into Christianity? The baptism administered by John the Baptist was also by immersion (Matt. 3:16; John 3:23). The practice of the day would suggest baptism by immersion.

The normal sense of the Greek prepositions would certainly indicate immersion also.

And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down INTO (EIS) the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came OUT OF (EK) the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.

Acts 8:38,39

A fourth argument for immersion is that it best illustrates certain aspects of the meaning of baptism. A number of years ago a ranch hand engaged in a friendly dispute with his foreman over the mode of baptism. The ranch hand believed in immersion, the foreman thought sprinkling was surely sufficient. Then one day a young horse died on the range. The hand was given the responsibility to bury it in a secluded corner of the ranch. Several days later the foreman found it with several handfuls of earth sprinkled generously over the carcass! The foreman saw the point. Sprinkling is no burial. Christian baptism illustrates our identification with Christ in His death and burial (Rom. 6:4). How significant immersion becomes when we recognize the great truth it illustrates.

Few would deny that the practice of the early Church was immersion. Even Calvin admits this but then proceeds to say we are free to choose the mode today. But are we? Why not follow the practice of the New Testament and the

early Church? The practice of the apostles was their precept and their theology cannot be set aside lightly. We have no right to modify or dispense with the commands of Christ.

Some years ago the speaker on a nationwide Christian radio broadcast defended sprinkling as the mode of baptism by referring to the several occurrences of the word "sprinkled" in the epistle to the Hebrews (9:13, 19,21; 10:22; 11:28; 12:24). To my amazement I discovered that not one of these verses was even remotely connected with baptism! In every case but one the reference is to the sprinkling of blood. Was he saying that baptism by sprinkling is the sprinkling or application of the blood of Christ to the one being baptized? This, of course, is baptismal regeneration! This is never the purpose of baptism in the New Testament. Sprinkling as a mode did not appear until the second century.

It is true that the Didache or The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles offered pouring as an optional mode of baptism. It must be remembered that many join Dr. Armitage Robinson in believing the Didache was a later production not representing the life and teaching of the early Church as it really was (Short History of the Christian Church., C. P. S. Clarke, Longmans 1961, p. 24). It must also be noted that the Didache allowed for pouring only if there was a short supply of water. It taught immersion as the normal mode. Clinical baptisms, or baptisms of dying persons in bed by pouring water on them, did not occur until the third century. Those who advocate pouring as the mode, suggest that baptism illustrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the individual. This is a lovely thought but it is without the sanction of scripture.

Some will object to baptism by immersion. But their objections can be answered. If it is physically impractical or dangerous, surely it is not the responsibility of a believer to do it. With proper care it need not be indecent. For some it will be inconvenient. To them we ask: Is it our convenience we are to consider with regard to obeying our Lord?

The last question which remains to be answered is the most critical of all. To whom should it be administered? Once again, what saith the scriptures?

The Candidate for Baptism

In the book of Acts there are recorded eight specific cases of baptism. Observe carefully the candidates. What are the qualifications for baptism?

So then, those who had RECEIVED HIS WORD were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:41

But when they BELIEVED Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Acts 8:12

And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (And Philip said, "If you BELIEVE with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.") And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Acts 8:36-38

Although it is true that verse 37 in the above text is omitted by the earlier manuscripts, the insertion of these words in later manuscripts indicate what was later considered by the church to qualify one for baptism.

And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized.

Acts 9: 18

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be

baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They asked him to stay on for a few days.

Acts 10:44-48

And after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having BELIEVED in God with his whole household.

Acts 16:30-34

And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, BELIEVED in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were BELIEVING and being baptized.

Acts 18:8

And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, and he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to BELIEVE in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 19:1-5

The testimony of the New Testament is unanimous. Christian baptism is believer's baptism. Those who were baptized were believers in Jesus Christ. They had been born again by the regenerating work of God the Holy Spirit in conjunction with their personal faith in Him as the Son of God and sacrifice for their sin.

Should There Be an Interval Between Conversion and Baptism?

To many of us today one of the most remarkable features of these recorded baptisms is that they were baptized immediately upon conversion. This seemed to be the common practice of the early church. Today there is often a lapse of months and years between conversion and baptism.

Sometimes this is the result of cowardice and shame. There is an unwillingness to confess openly one's identification with Christ. What a disappointment to the Lord! One for whom He died, one whom He has redeemed from destruction, one with whom He will some day share His throne - that one is unwilling to acknowledge publicly that he belongs to the Lord!

Often the long interval is the product of a failure to be confronted by teaching on the doctrine of baptism. As it is the first of all outward duties of a Christian it ought to be taught repeatedly and emphatically in our churches and to the new converts.

There are times, however, when an interval between regeneration and baptism seems expedient. Today the possibility of a mere profession of salvation without a genuine work of the Holy Spirit is ever present. There is no "price to pay" for a new Christian in a land where Christianity is accepted. Often there is much to gain by such a profession. In the first century it was not so. Of course, there was still the danger of mere profession, but the certain social and religious ostracism lessened the danger considerably. In our society it may be sometimes wise to allow (not require) a period of time to elapse during which the reality of conversion may be demonstrated by fruit and perseverance.

But there is another point to consider. Against the background of John's baptism and proselyte baptism the new converts could be expected to understand the primary significance of Christian baptism. The concept of identification was common to them all. Such understanding can be expected of no one today. For this reason it may

be expedient to allow for an interval of time before baptism so the new convert can be instructed in the doctrinal and practical significance of the ordinance.

What About Our Christian Children?

Often I am asked about our children. How old should a Christian child be before he is baptized? Who ought to take the initiative toward his baptism, the child or the parent? After much contemplation and experience I have developed several personal convictions. If it is to be a significant and meaningful act the child must understand the biblical teaching on the subject. It would be a disservice to him, an abuse of the ordinance and an affront to the Lord to baptize him before he understands its basic significance. He will spend the rest of his Christian life growing to understand its full significance, but the basic meaning ought to be comprehended before he is baptized.

Also, if it is to be a public expression of his identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, there ought to be some evidence of genuine conversion in his life. False professions are too commonplace among children with Christian parents. Are there evidences of spiritual life? Who better can observe this than the Christian parents.

The decision to be baptized surely must be the decision of the child in response to the Bible teaching of his parents and the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. A good friend of mine has said. "The best teacher a child will ever have is his father." As the God-ordained head of the house, the father bears the primary responsibility to teach his children. In conjunction with teaching them the gospel he will teach the doctrine of baptism. He may do it formally or informally, as a family or individually, but he will do it. One of the most effective ways I have found is to discuss the subject together as a family over supper during the week prior to a baptismal service. Through the week he may cover five questions: Who (the candidates)? Why (the meaning)? When (the time)? How (the mode)? What (the results)? One question a night is sufficient. With review quizzes, probing questions, and personal experiences this can be a very exciting time and will make the Sunday baptism very meaningful to your children. As a godly parent so teaches his child, he will earnestly pray for God the Holy Spirit to stir the heart of his child to respond. Then baptism will be an act of obedience to the Lord and His Word. You have helped him develop a pattern of responding to the Word under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This pattern will mould his life!

What About Our Infant Children

If Christian baptism is believer's baptism there is no place for the baptism of infants.

In his Systematic Theology, A. H. Strong has enumerated several reasons which are worth considering for rejecting the baptism of children before they are believers.

There is no biblical basis for such a practice. There is not one clear example of it anywhere in the New Testament. Admittedly, the household was baptized along with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33). But we are distinctly told in the following verse that he believed "in God with all his house." This seems to indicate they all became believers. I have had the privilege of baptizing several households. In each case, however, every member had become a believer. Besides the absence of any clear example of infant baptism there is the absence of any clear command in the New Testament to justify it. Matthew 19:14 does not mention baptism nor does it refer to it. Christian baptism had not yet been instituted! First Corinthians 7:14 surely does not teach it either. If baptism is here in relation to the children, then one must also say the unbelieving husband is also saved! Who would admit this? On the baptism of infants the scriptures are silent. There is neither precept or precedent in the New Testament for such a practice.

Furthermore, the notion of infant baptism is a contradiction to the scriptures. What is its purpose? To some it is the removal of original sin. This is a contradiction of 1 John 1:7. It is the blood of Christ which cleanses from sin. To others it is the way into the church. This is a contradiction of 1 John 5:11-13. The church is composed of Christians, men who have believed in Jesus Christ and possess eternal life. Even Martin Luther saw the conflict here. To our amazement he taught justification by faith while he held to infant baptism. He went on to say that the infant was

justified by faith at its baptism! To still others it is a dedication of a child to the Lord. Every parent is to be commended for such a desire, but we must never confuse dedication and baptism.

According to A. H. Strong, the testimony of history is that infant baptism did not rise until the mid-second century and early part of the third century in the midst of a sacramental conception of Christianity. As a result we have already observed that many of the arguments for it are virtually the arguments for baptismal regeneration.

Perhaps the most difficult point to answer is the relationship between circumcision and infant baptism.

Advocates of infant baptism maintain it has superceded circumcision. This is only an assumption. It is true of course that both are signs. But we must not forget that while circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, the cup of the Lord's Supper (not baptism) is the sign of the New Covenant. If baptism superceded circumcision, why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? The only text that places them together is Colossians 2:10-12:

And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Col. 2:10-12

There is no indication here that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. It only suggests that what circumcision was physically - a cutting off of the flesh, baptism illustrates spiritually - a putting off of the flesh. This verse is not even speaking of physical circumcision.

We are inclined to agree with the Paulicians of the fourth century who opposed infant baptism saying it was Satan's number one back door for getting pagans into the church.

What About Rebaptism?

Recently a lady expressed to the elders of the Chapel her desire for baptism. She then proceeded to explain her reason for the desire. She had been baptized many years ago as a believer but only recently had she come to understand the significance of it. Now she wished to be re-baptized.

On many occasions I have been asked to re-baptize believers who had been restored from a life of sin and disobedience. They thought they ought to be re-baptized.

There is no indication in the scriptures that believers were ever re-baptized. That is, the instructions and examples of the New Testament indicate that believer's baptism is a single episode in a Christian's life. Who of us fully understood the significance of baptism when we were baptized? If we have been growing in grace we surely understand much more today than we did then. Shall we be re-baptized? Surely not. Shall we who have been restored from backsliding be re-baptized? The way of restoration is plainly presented in 1 John 1:9. There is no mention of re-baptism. Every indication from the scriptures is that believer's baptism was not a rite to be repeated. As baptism emphasizes our entrance into the Christian life it is to be done only once.

However, the New Testament does teach rebaptism! A remarkable incident occurred in Ephesus. According to Acts 19:1-5 some who had previously been baptized into John's baptism, when they heard of the coming Christ, believed and "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). This would certainly suggest that a person who has been baptized by any form of baptism other than believer's baptism ought to be re-baptized as a believer after he is converted.

In the strictest sense, of course, this is not re-baptism because the first "baptism" (infant baptism or baptism as an unbeliever) was not a legitimate or biblical baptism at all.

The Way of Joy

The last glimpse we have of the Ethiopian eunuch after he was baptized is that "he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). This indeed is the experience of those who, as true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, intelligently obey His command to be baptized.

Are you a true believer in Him? If so, have you obeyed His Word in this matter? Remember: "if you love me, keep my commandments." Your obedience will not only bring great pleasure to the heart of your Lord but it will also be a giant step forward in the pathway of genuine Christian happiness.

How soon that joy fades for many. Although the reason escapes them, it is only too apparent to others. Baptism is a matter of the heart as well as an outward profession. The truly baptized believer is the one whose life shows that the flesh, the old nature, has been put in the place of death. This is accomplished by the enablement of the Holy Spirit alone, and results in the joy of the Lord.

"He went on his way rejoicing."

It was not only because he had obeyed the Lord and publicly identified himself with His Lord. It was also because he had come to the end of a long search.

God had begun to work in his heart. There came a desire to know God in a personal way. The sense of guilt had grown. There was a deep longing for peace of conscience and peace with God. In the religions of Ethiopia he had found no answers. Perhaps it was this that brought him to Jerusalem. He had found no answer there either. There was religion with its rituals. But it was empty. There was nothing to bring peace and forgiveness and salvation.

Still searching, he turned homeward. Then it happened. God directed him to a prophetic word in holy scripture penned hundreds of years earlier but fulfilled just months ago.

"He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a Lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth." And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?" And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Acts 8:32-35

Here is the end of long and earnest search. God brought to him the message of Jesus and His love. The eunuch learned that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who had come to earth to die. The inquirer was told that the death of Jesus Christ was a substitutionary death. He bore the penalty for our sins. His death satisfied the righteous demands of God. He paid for our sin. The earnest searcher also learned that on the basis of the death of Christ for his sins God offered forgiveness and salvation to all men. In a simple but significant step of faith the traveler believed that Jesus was indeed the very Son of God who had died for him and he began at that moment to trust in Him and His atoning death for the forgiveness of his sin and God's salvation.

The long search had ended. Little did he realize that in reality all the while it was the Lord who had been seeking him. Now the Shepherd had found His lost sheep. Through trusting Jesus for his salvation the eunuch entered into peace with God. God became his heavenly Father and he became a child of God. Sin was forgiven and salvation was possessed. Little wonder "he went on his way rejoicing."

If you have a deep longing, a desire to know God personally as your heavenly Father, if you have a deep sense of guilt before God because of your sin, if you are earnestly seeking for forgiveness, peace and salvation. I assure you, my friend, it is because the Lord is seeking you. This could be the end of a long and diligent search. It could be the first step toward going on your way rejoicing. What must you do? In quiet prayer simply confess to Him you are a sinner. Thank Him for dying in your place, bearing the punishment you deserved. Trust Him to be your Savior. Trust His death to be sufficient payment for all your sin. Trust His Word which then assures you eternal life.

And the witness is this. that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God. in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:11-12