

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

23rd April 2006

Read: Romans 6: 1-11

Text: v.v. 3 & 4

The Mode of Baptism

The Lord Jesus Christ as Head of His Body, the Church, has instituted the two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The observance of these ordinances or sacraments is therefore not optional: they are commanded by Christ and are to be observed by His people until He comes again. Moreover, the reason why Christ has appointed these two sacraments is for the spiritual benefit & welfare of His people. As we have been noting in this series of messages Christ the Head of the Church has ordained certain *means of grace* for His people whereby they will be built up in spiritual life. We have already considered the Word & Prayer as means of grace for the Church and have already begun to consider the sacrament of baptism. It is important to keep in mind on this issue of Baptism that it is not possible to preach it with respect to its being a means of grace, without giving at least some attention to it as a belief or doctrine. We must seek to have some understanding of the teaching of Scripture on water baptism in order to draw benefit to our souls.

In the initial message on this ordinance I addressed you on the issue of *The Significance of Baptism*: to be precise, on the significance of the very word *baptism* itself as it is used in the NT; and it was found that the principal sense of the word is that of union. Therefore, we concluded that since the essence of the very word is that of union, then the ordinance of water baptism is a symbol of union with Christ. Thus, it was stressed that a proper understanding of water baptism will have us conclude that the ordinance does not establish union with Christ or even contribute to it in the slightest way. Union with Christ is effected and sustained by the Spirit of God not by water, irrespective of when and how it is applied in the ordinance of baptism: to entertain the notion that the water "does the trick" is to embrace the wicked lie of baptismal regeneration and is to place the soul in the greatest peril.

With respect to the sacrament of baptism there are two other matters to consider – namely, the *Mode & Subjects of Baptism*: that is, how should people be baptised and when should they be baptised. Sadly, it is with respect to these matters that great controversy has arisen throughout time, leading to much rancorous debate, bitterness and of course division among the Lord's people. This should not be – for the simple reason that Baptism, while commanded & instituted by Christ as one of the two sacrament, is not essential to salvation and is not, therefore, a cardinal doctrine of the Gospel. Note again Paul's words in 1 Cor 1: 17 – "*Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.*" Words like these should be noted carefully for they place a distinction between the Gospel and the ordinance of baptism itself. Thus, they clearly underline that no church body or individual Christian ought to make a particular view of baptism an integral part of the Gospel and thus a basis for either fellowship on one hand or separation on the other.

In the light of such Scripture, there is clearly a case for God's people to hold in love for one another, differing views with respect to the mode and subjects of baptism, so long as no one espouses the error of baptismal regeneration. It is in this spirit that our denomination, since its very inception in 1951, has practised acceptance of both baptist and paedobaptist believers into its communicant membership. Note the following statement from the *Articles of Faith of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster: Article 6a* – "The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, under Christ the great King and Head of the Church, realises that bitter controversy, raging around the mode and proper subjects of the ordinance of Christian Baptism, has divided the Body of Christ when that Body should have been united in Christian love and Holy Ghost power to stem the onslaughts and hell-inspired attacks of modernism, hereby affirms that each member of the Free Presbyterian Church shall have liberty to decide for himself which courses to adopt on these controversial issues, each member giving due honour in love to the views held by differing brethren, but none espousing the error of baptismal regeneration."

Please note that in the case of all ministers and elders of our church, subscription to this article takes place at ordination & induction to office, so that each minister and elder gives his oath to uphold our church's policy on baptism; and that the policy presented in this particular article of faith is binding on each communicant member of this denomination. With this reminder of our denomination's policy with respect to the mode and subjects of the ordinance of baptism let us proceed today to consider a number of points concerning the issue of mode of baptism.

I. *FIRST, SCRIPTURE DOES NOT TEACH A CERTAIN MODE AS THE ONLY ONE TO BE HELD*

It must be clearly stated and understood that in the history of the Christian Church most Protestant churches have held that baptism may be administered by immersion, pouring or sprinkling. Baptist churches and other bodies as well, have always insisted that immersion in water is the only valid method or mode of baptism. But with respect to Church history all 3 modes have been held – a practice dating back to the earliest times. Close of canon of Scripture – approx 95AD bringing the Apostolic age to an end. But a writing known as *The Didachae* was produced around 100AD, setting forth various doctrines & teachings, including reference to the ordinance of baptism. The relevant point is that it shows that all three modes were practised within the Christian Church.; and as noted this has always been the case down through Church history. These few historical details serve to show that one mode of baptism only has not been the practice of the Christian Church, serving to stress a vital point – namely this: *Scripture does not teach a particular mode of baptism as the only one that should be employed by God's people*; and this is the view of our own denomination on this issue of mode. Note some Scriptures.

(a) Heb 9: 7-10 – the passage refers to the OT tabernacle and some of the ceremonial rites of that system of worship. In v.10 note the words “*divers washings...*” where the original word for ‘washings’ is *baptismois* – the standard word for “baptism” in the NT. Thus, here the word is used for something other than a certain mode of baptism because the reference is actually to various purification rites in connection with Tabernacle worship.

(b) Mark 7 – note how the chapter commences. V.v. 1 & 2 – the Pharisees upset with Christ because His disciples did not wash their hands before eating. First, it must be noted that this was not a matter of hygiene; rather it was a Pharisaic ritual as v.3 shows – they actually believed that by following this ritual they would gain eternal life. Then, v.4 shows the extent to which they held this ritual – “the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.” Now, in relation to this ritualistic washing practised by the Pharisees, the word employed by the Spirit of God is this same word that means *to baptize*: so, we could read – *the baptizing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.*” But note the clear point or observation – not all of the items in view in v.4 could be immersed or submerged. The brasen vessels – the reference is actually to the largest vessel that would have been in a Jewish home; thus -- in what was it immersed if the Greek word for baptize always means *to immerse*? The tables – the word could also be translated ‘couch’ or ‘bed’, thus the reference is to the largest furnishings in the house, which again would have been difficult to immerse or submerge.

(c) Acts 8: 36 & 38 – the occasion is the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. Often this passage is employed to prove the claim that the verb *baptize* always means or signifies immersion; especially the clause – “they went down both into the water.” But the problem with such an interpretation is clear – it would mean that Philip himself was immersed for he went “*down into the water...*” also. Thus, if the words *into the water* imply immersion, they imply it for both men and this obviously proves too much. The point is that the language here gives no support for the contention that one particular mode of baptism is the only one taught in Scripture.

These Scriptures and the significance of them make a very clear point – in the NT with respect to baptism, the issue of mode is not so clear as to create a basis for dogmatism on the question of how people should be baptised. Note the following about the NT word for *baptize* or *baptism*. As a verb it is found 80 times and in all but four cases it is rendered *baptize* in our AV. As a noun it is found 26 times and in all but two instances is rendered *baptism*. Now here is the important point – the translators of the NT in all but a few places did not actually translate the word; rather, they transliterated it; i.e. they essentially left it as it is in the original language. As noted, the few times they did translate the word they rendered it *wash* or *washing*. But why not *sprinkle* or *pour* or *immerse*? For the simple reason that they saw that the usage & sense of the word in the NT Scriptures is such that mode is not the issue. Thus, those who insist that the words *baptize* and *baptism* always denotes a certain mode are wrong. As noted previously, the significance of the word is union – it symbolises our union with Christ. This is the vital thing, not the actual mode by which baptism is administered.

II. THE POINT THEN IS THIS -- SCRIPTURE TEACHES ALL THREE MODES EACH PRESENTING ITS OWN PERSPECTIVE ON THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

Baptism is to be administered, thus what mode should be employed? As noted, our church’s position is that, in keeping with the historic Reformed position, all three modes are Biblical and that you are free to employ any one of them, the vital matter being that you see & meditate on the significance of the ordinance itself. In actual fact, each mode, being Biblical, presents its own particular perspective on the meaning of the ordinance and therefore each perspective contributes to baptism being a means of grace to the soul.

(a) Immersion – the thinking with respect to immersion as a mode of baptism is that it symbolises union with Christ as being dead, buried and risen with Him. Support for this teaching is drawn from Rom 6: 3 & 4 where the truths of death, burial and resurrection with Christ are in view. Remember, however, that in the actual text here the baptism is spiritual only. It is baptism into union with Christ, which only comes by the grace & power of the Spirit, never by water. But since water baptism is symbolic of union with Christ; and since the words *baptized* & *baptism* are used here, it is legitimate to see in these verses the concept of immersion and that it signifies dying with, being buried with and rising with Christ. In other words, immersion as a mode of baptism underlines the actual experience of union with Christ.

(b) Pouring – in our salvation or union with Christ, the Holy Spirit comes upon us to indwell us; and this action of Christ sending His Spirit upon men is signified in Scripture by pouring. Note the following verses: Luke 3: 16 – here John uses the very same words when speaking of his administration of water baptism and Christ’s administration of the baptism of the Spirit. Now see Acts 1: 5 – here Christ uses virtually the same words as He speaks of John’s baptism and predicts the baptism of the apostles by the Spirit. Now see Acts 2 where the prediction was fulfilled. Note v.4 – the actual event of the Spirit coming on the disciples, which, remember John & Christ said would be a baptism. Now v.18 – here is how the Spirit came on the disciples: “*on my servants and on my handmaidens I will **pour out** in those days of my Spirit.*” The Spirit came on them by pouring; see v.33 where the word “shed” is the same – *pour*. Hence, since the word *baptize* or *baptism* is clearly associated with the idea of pouring, then water baptism is also symbolic of the Spirit of God being poured upon God’s people with respect to their salvation & their entire spiritual experience.

(c) Sprinkling – in the OT there are references to *sprinkling* in connection with various Levitical rites that were essentially ceremonial baptisms. In the NT there are certain references to sprinkling in connection with cleansing & forgiveness of sin, Heb 10: 22, Heb 12: 24 & 1 Pet 1: 2. Thus, this mode of baptism signifies cleansing from sin.