

The Subject of Baptism (3rd)

(In our previous studies regarding Greek words for baptism and their connection with the rite of water baptism, we covered the gospels and the book of Acts. Today we continue by looking into the epistles.)

So far we find that the passages in the gospels and the book of Acts support what Baptists believe concerning the subjects or candidates for baptism. It is “those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ” and does not include “infants of one, or both, believing parents.” Now we will look at this subject in the epistles.

We find the subject of baptism first mentioned in the epistles in the book of Romans. The Greek words are mentioned in verses three and four. However, to help with the understanding we will try to set the verses in context by reading Romans 6:1-6: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Paul is teaching the saints at Rome that because they are justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ they are to also live holy lives because of their baptism. When one is baptized, he is testifying that he is dead to the world and that he desires to “walk in newness of life” to the glory of God. Obviously, this argument is for adults or those who can hear and comprehend the arguments made in this text and not for infants.

Calvin maintained that Paul’s teaching here is for believers. In his commentary on Romans, he said, “It is beyond question that we put on Christ in baptism, and that we are baptized on this principle that we may be one with Him. ... Indeed, he teaches us that this fellowship of His death is the focal centre of baptism. ... Baptism means that being dead to ourselves, we may become new creatures. Paul rightly passes from the fellowship of Christ’s death to the sharing of His life. ... Having laid this fundamental proposition, Paul may very properly exhort Christians to strive to live in a manner that corresponds to their calling. It is irrelevant to argue that this power is not apparent in all the baptized, for Paul, because he is speaking to believers, connects the reality and the effect with the outward sign (*substantiam et effectum externo signo coniungit*) in his usual manner. ... In short, he teaches us what the truth of baptism is, when rightly received. Thus he testifies that all Galatians who had been baptized into Christ had put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).” *Commentary on Romans*, pp.122-123.

The Baptist, Robert Haldane, is in agreement. “The rite of baptism exhibits Christians as dying, as buried, and as risen with Christ. ... In baptism, they are also represented as dying with Christ. ... The death of Christ was the means by which sin was destroyed, and His burial the proof of the reality of His death. Christians are therefore represented as buried with Him by baptism into His death, in token that they really died with Him; and if buried with Him, it is not that they shall remain in the grave, but that, as Christ arose from the dead, they should also rise. Their baptism, then, is the figure of their complete deliverance from the guilt of sin, signifying that God places to their account the death of Christ as their own death: it is also a figure of their purification and resurrection for the service of God.” *Commentary*, pp. 244-245.

(I realize that some in modern times [both protestants and Baptists] set forth that baptism in Romans 6 is referring to “Holy Spirit” baptism. Our plans are to discuss that topic at a later time. For now, we are only studying to see if the Scriptures support infant or child baptism.)

The next passage we find in the epistles is in I Corinthians 1:14-17, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Paul affirms that he baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, but he couldn't remember if he baptized any other. When we studied Acts chapter eighteen, we saw that Paul not only baptized Crispus, but also "all his house." The text also stated that all in Crispus' house believed. The verse in Acts 18:8 further states that "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." This would include the "household of Stephanas." Therefore, this passage does not support infant baptism either.

In I Corinthians 10:2, the baptism there refers to the children of Israel in the wilderness and their identity with Moses and will not be considered with the subject at hand since it is not in connection with water baptism.

I Corinthians 12:13 is a unique verse and is generally considered in modern times as what is called "Holy Spirit baptism." We are going to pass over this passage at this time because our plan is to do an entire study regarding this in the future. This passage is generally not used by the protestants to support infant baptism anyway.

The next passage to consider is I Corinthians 15:29. While this passage is a controversial verse it is not one used by the reformers to support infant baptism either. In analogy with the overall interpretation of the Scriptures concerning baptism, it is obvious that it does not mean that someone can be baptized for someone who has died. We know from I Peter 3:21 that baptism is a figure (type, picture) of the "complete deliverance from the guilt of sin" of the believer. And as Peter connects baptism with the resurrection of Christ, Paul links it to either the death of Christ and our being resurrected in Him or our being raised to walk in holiness as portrayed by us as we "were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death," Rm. 6:3.

Since Calvin referenced Galatians 3:27 in connection with Romans 6:3-4 which teaches that we publicly put on Christ or become identified with Christ, then this passage is not teaching anything about infant baptism. A child or infant being baptized is not consciously putting on Christ in any way.

Now we come to Ephesians 4:5. The verse reads, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." However, the context is much the same as Romans 6 and Galatians 3 where Paul is encouraging the saints at Ephesus to walk in holiness according to the truth of the Lord. Whatever the passage is teaching and whatever can be gleaned from this verse, there is nothing in this verse to infer infant baptism.

The passage in Colossians (Col. 2:12) is the same context as that of Ephesians and Romans. Since Colossians is somewhat of a parallel epistle to that of Ephesians, the similarity is easily seen. Therefore, there is again no support in this passage for infant baptism.

Much the same can be said with the passage in Hebrews 6:2. Whether this "baptisms" is referring to ceremonial washing of the Old Testament economy or of New Testament water baptism, there is nothing in the text to encourage anyone to teach or practice infant baptism.

The last passage where a Greek word for baptism is used in the New Testament is I Peter 3:21. We have referred to this verse previously and we found that it clearly teaches that baptism is a figure (picture, type) of the "complete deliverance from the guilt of sin" of the believer. There is something else about this passage that should help to clarify our question. One thing that baptism does for the believer is that it is "the answer of a good conscience toward God." When an infant is baptized, it cannot be said that the child is receiving "the answer of a good conscience toward God." Regardless of what an infant may know, it is doubtful that he knows whether he has a good conscience or a bad conscience before God. This passage gives more support for the Baptist position than the protestant view because the actions leans toward one who professes faith in Christ and obedience to the Scriptures.

We have covered all the passages that have the Greek word for baptism in connection with water baptism. Obviously, we omitted those passages where the Greek words clearly refer to ceremonial washing under the Old Testament or where they are used symbolically for descriptive language of suffering. Also, we set aside I Corinthians 12:13 because we plan (as we previously stated) to cover this in a separate study. In our next study, we plan to take up other basic passages which the protestants use to support infants or small children as candidates for baptism, but our time is up for today.