

Baptism

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From *McGarvey's Sermons Delivered in Louisville, Kentucky*
(June-September, 1893)

Since it has been announced that my subject would be baptism, I think it highly probable that the question has arisen in the minds of some, Why another sermon on that old, hackneyed theme? Perhaps the objection has arisen that this subject has been discussed and debated for hundreds of years, and it has never yet been settled. Why then continue to disturb the minds of the people with it? This objection involves a serious mistake. The question, it is true, has not in one sense been settled, that is, all the people have not been brought to an agreement in regard to it; but in another and a very important sense, it has been settled thousands and thousands of times; that is, it has been settled in the minds of men and women who have to give an account to God in the great day, and they have acted according to the settlement of it in their own minds. And let me say to you who are here tonight, it is a necessity laid on you, you can not avoid it, that you shall also settle the question in your own mind and for your own soul. You can not go into any church on earth, except that of the Quakers, without being baptized -- that is, without submitting to an ordinance which the church calls baptism. And if you are ever to become a member of any church, with the exception of the one named, before you do so you are compelled to decide in your own mind what baptism is, and that will be settling the question so far as you are concerned. If you answer me, No, sir, the question was settled for me by my parents when I was an infant, and they baptized me, even this does not enable you to escape the necessity of which I speak; you are compelled to decide for yourself before God, whether you will be satisfied with that as your obedience to this divine command. So then, to come to some practical decision of this disputed theme, is a necessity laid upon every one of you, and you will all give an account thereof to God in the day of judgment. Don't be impatient, then, when a man proposes to discuss the subject in your presence. Don't be unwilling to hear him. Whatever may be the position he takes, whichever side of the controverted question he stands on, don't be unwilling to hear all that he says, and to hear it candidly, to weigh it fairly, so that you may decide the question intelligently.

But a man says, "According to my understanding of this controversy, it requires some knowledge of the dead languages, and especially of the Greek, in order to render an intelligent decision as to what baptism is; and as I am no scholar, I think God will not hold me to an account if I should happen to decide it incorrectly." Well, that is a mistake. It is a mistake to suppose that it requires scholarship in any dead language to determine what baptism is. And I am inclined to believe -- I do believe -- that every man who has ordinary common sense can take his English New Testament, and learn, from the careful study of it, what God requires of him in order that he may live a life well pleasing in the sight of his Maker. I do not think you will find a Protestant preacher in the United States who will call that proposition in question.

What, then, is a man to do who does not understand Greek, who is a plain English scholar, and no more? I once heard (a good many years ago) a man of very plain common sense, with no scholarship, not even an accurate English education, make this remark: "If my mind were unsettled in regard to baptism, I would take this course: -- I would take my own New Testament, and, beginning at the first chapter of Matthew, I would read it all the way through, watching for that word 'baptism'; and everywhere I found

it, I would examine carefully the passage in which I found it, and learn all I could about it; and when I got through I would put all of this together, and I would make up my mind on the whole subject of baptism that way. Then I would feel sure that it was God teaching me, and that he would approve my decision." The remark struck me with great force, and I have from that day to this been of the opinion that it is the best way by which any man can proceed to settle this much controverted question. It does not involve a single word in any language but our own. It does not involve arguments and disputations on the subject from other men. It involves nothing but listening to the utterances of God's word as you have it in your own vernacular, forming your own conclusions, and then taking up your line of action. Now, if that is not safe, I don't know what is. You may imagine it a very big task to read the book through and through, but there is not much more reading-matter in it than there is in today's Courier-Journal. I don't think there is as much. When I tell you that I propose to lead you through that kind of examination of the subject tonight, don't think I am going to keep you here till midnight. To save us the time that would otherwise be involved, I have already gone through my little Testament, and turned down leaves and marked with my pencil the passages, so we will not have to hunt for them very much. I now propose that every one of you who has a Bible in hand, or can find one in your pew, will join me in this plain, simple, childlike search for God's utterances on this important theme.

We will open at the beginning of the Book, but, before beginning to read, let us have one other preparation of mind on the subject, which I think is necessary in order that we may reach the safest possible results, and that is this: -- If you want to investigate any question without bias of mind, it is a good thing to throw out of your mind, by an effort of the imagination, all you know or ever have heard about it, and come to the investigation as if the subject was absolutely a new one of which you had never heard a word in your life before. Come with your mind like a sheet of blank paper, ready for God to write on it whatever you find in his holy word. I propose, then, that before we begin reading we shall each one imagine that we have never heard the word "baptism" pronounced in our lives. We are not aware that there is such a word in existence; and when we come to it while reading we will not go to the dictionary, Greek or English, but we will pause upon it and see if the Book itself explains it to us; and, if so, we will have God's definition of it.

VERSES IN MATTHEW ON BAPTISM

Now we begin at the first chapter of Matthew, and after reading that long list of names, and that account of the birth of the Lord, and of his childhood, in the third chapter the writer introduces John the Baptist; and in verses 5 and 6 we read thus: -- "Then went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judea, and the region round about the Jordan, and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." Why, there is a word I never saw before; I never heard of it. I wonder what it means -- that these people were baptized by that man in the river Jordan. I would like to know what it means; but I believe I will let the New Testament itself explain it to me if it will. I do not know what was done to those people by John, but can I learn anything about it in this passage? Yes, they were baptized in the river Jordan; that tells where it was done, and it tells it so plainly that there can be no mistake about it.

So let us read on and see if we can learn more. At the eleventh verse, the same John says to his audience, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I; whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Here is our strange word again, and this time John says "I baptize you with water." Well, there is another thing we learn about it -- that water and not wine or milk or honey, or any other liquid, but water is used in this ordinance.

We read on in the same chapter, and at the thirteenth verse we have these words: "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John to be baptized of him. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" And Jesus said, "Suffer it now, John, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." "Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water." Well, we see what he did when he was through with the baptizing -- he "went up straightway from the water." But that is all. It does not tell us what the baptizing was. As regards the act itself that is called baptizing, we are as much in the dark as we were before.

From this whole chapter we learn only this -- that when John baptized, it was in the river Jordan; that he used (in some way, we don't know how) water; and that after Jesus was baptized he went up straightway from the water, showing that he had been down to it; but that is all we learn, so we read on.

Our curiosity is awakened now, and chapter after chapter, leaf after leaf we turn, and we do not find our word again, in its literal sense, until we come to the last chapter of Matthew, eighteenth and nineteenth verses. "Jesus came to them and spake to them, saying, All authority hath been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Here is our strange word again, and what do we learn about it here? Why, that those men were to baptize all the nations. It was to be a universal thing. And they were to baptize them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Well, it is becoming interesting. "Baptize them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," is a very solemn thing, and it is to be universal as the nations of men. We wonder more than ever what it is.

VERSES IN MARK ON BAPTISM

We are through with Matthew now. We will begin in Mark. We may have to read the whole New Testament through before we get our question answered.

The fourth verse of the first chapter of Mark says: "John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins." Here is another place of baptizing. In Matthew we found that he baptized in the river Jordan. Here, we learn he baptized in the wilderness. That puzzles us a little, until we know the geography of Palestine -- we remember that a portion of the river Jordan, near its mouth, runs along a barren wilderness on its western bank. This, then, tells us in what part of the river Jordan John baptized. "And there went out to him," says the fifth verse, "all the country of Judea and all they of Jerusalem, and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." Yes, we were right; it is in the "river Jordan" and in the wilderness at the same time.

At the eighth verse, John says to the people, "I baptize you with water;" but we knew that before.

At the ninth verse: "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized of John in the Jordan, and straightway coming up out of the water he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him." Well, we learned from Matthew that he went up from the water, and now it says in Mark that he up out of the water. He had then been down in it. So Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan, and after he was baptized he went up out of the water. It looks as if the baptizing had been done in the water, but still we do not know what it was.

We read on. We go all the way through Mark to the last chapter (the sixteenth) before we learn

anything more about it. The fifteenth and sixteenth verses read: "And he said to them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Here is that same idea of its universality which we learned from Matthew; and here is an additional thought connected with it, that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; and this adds interest to our inquiry. Still, no light is thrown upon the act itself; so we must patiently go on with our reading.

VERSES IN LUKE ON BAPTISM

In the third chapter of Luke we meet with our strange word again, third verse. Speaking of John, the text says "He cometh to all the region round about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins." It was not only where the Jordan ran through the wilderness then, but in "all the region round about the Jordan," that John preached; and here we also learn that he preached the "baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins." If it was a baptism of repentance, a baptism which required a man to repent before he submitted to it, and unto the remission of sins, it must have been a matter of supreme importance. The subject grows upon us by the words used in connection with it, but no light comes yet as to what the particular act itself was. If we had started out, knowing the meaning of the word, we would not have had this trouble; but we want the New Testament to show us its meaning, so we read on.

VERSES IN JOHN ON BAPTISM

We read through Luke and into John without additional light; but in the third chapter of John, twenty-second and twenty-third verses, we stumble on it once more. "After these things Jesus came and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them and baptized." So we find from this that not only did John baptize, and not only did Jesus command his disciples to go into all nations and baptize, but that Jesus himself baptized at one time. "And John also was baptizing in Enon near to Salim, because there was much water there, and they came and were baptized." Well, we learned in Matthew, and also in Mark, that John used water in baptizing. Now we learn that when he left the Jordan, he went to Enon near to Salim, because there was much water there; and this shows that he wanted "much water" with which to baptize. But this is a very vague expression. A pitcherful is much compared with a glassful; a barrelful is much compared with a pitcherful; and a river is much compared with any of our vessels of water. So the text is extremely vague when it says "much water." We are learning very slowly as regards the act itself, but we must be patient when we are in search of the truth.

VERSES IN ACTS ON BAPTISM

We read on through John without any further satisfaction, and into the Book of Acts; and in the second chapter of that book and forty-first verse, we learn that "they that received the words of Peter were baptized, and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls." In the thirty-eighth verse Peter says to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." And thus we learn that the apostles did as Jesus told them -- went abroad to preach the gospel, and required men to be baptized. Peter, in telling them to be baptized, says, "Be baptized unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When we thus find that the gift of the Holy Spirit is connected with it, its importance grows upon us: still there is nothing here to tell us what baptism is.

We read on. We come to the eighth chapter of Acts. We find there that Philip is preaching the gospel in

Samaria, and "when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Nothing to explain the act itself.

In the same chapter, further on, Philip and the eunuch are riding in the chariot together, and Philip is preaching to the eunuch. At the thirty-sixth verse we read, "And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water." We have already learned that water was the element used. "And the eunuch said, Behold, here is water; what hindereth me to be baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away." We learn additional items from this. We learn that before the baptizing, the baptist and the candidate both went down into the water; that while they were down in the water, the baptizing was done; and that they then came up out of the water. We have not found the answer to our question yet, but we are getting it hemmed in. John baptized in the river Jordan, and Enon where there was much water. Now we learn that the performing the act they went down into the water: it was done while they were down there, and then they came up out of the water; and this explains how Jesus came up out of the water when he was baptized: but what Philip said to the eunuch called baptism; what John did to Jesus called baptism -- the question on which we started out -- is not answered yet.

When we get into the ninth of Acts, we find that Saul of Tarsus was baptized; but nothing is said about it to indicate what the act was; and so in regard to Cornelius; so in regard to Lydia; so in regard to the Philippian jailer. The disciples are carrying out their commission to baptize men, but we find no words in these passages to indicate what the act was.

VERSES IN ROMANS ON BAPTISM

We read into Romans, the first epistle in the order in which they are printed. In the sixth chapter, third and fourth verses, we read these words: "Are you ignorant that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Ah! There are two new thoughts. When men are baptized under Christ, they are baptized into Jesus Christ, and baptized into his death. The importance of the act still grows. The apostle proceeds: "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." What does the apostle say was done through baptism "We were buried with him through baptism into death." Let us pause with that. We have learned before that the persons to be baptized and the man who baptized them went down into the water; the baptizing was done there; and done with the water; then they came up out of the water. Now we learn, that in that baptism they were buried; and if water was the element, what conclusion can we reach than this, that they were buried in the water? That explains, at last, what the act was. But if we had never heard of the matter before, we might exclaim, Bury a man in the water? ... and if you leave him there, he will drown. But he is not to be left there; for Jesus came up straightway out of the water. Philip and the eunuch came up out of the water. Well, then, it was a temporary burial and not a permanent one, would be our conclusion. But not to allow anything to rest upon mere inferences, however logical, let us read a little further and see if we can find any light on that particular point.

VERSES IN COLOSSIANS ON BAPTISM

We read on, then, and when we come into the second chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians and twelfth verse, we have this language: "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead." Jesus Christ was

buried in the tomb, and on the third morning he came up. "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with him," makes our burial in water a representation of his burial in the tomb, and our rising from the water, of his rising from the dead. This burial explains some of the things that we met with before. It explains why a river like the Jordan was used instead of some smaller water. It explains why much water was needed and found at Enon -- enough to bury men. It explains why, previous to the baptism, they went down into the water. They could not bury a man without doing so. It explains why, at the termination of it, they always came up out of the water. We learn, then, that baptism is an act in which a man is buried in water and raised again in imitation of the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is done by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ himself; the blessing which follows the act is the remission of our sins; the act brings us into Christ, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and it is followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If this is all true, my friends, it is a most solemn, interesting and precious ordinance. We can not overestimate the value of it. We can not consent to speak of it as a mere external act. It is the most solemn and significant ordinance ever appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ, not excepting that in which we partake of his broken body and shed blood. Let my tongue be palsied, and my hand and arm drop from my shoulder-blade before I dare to speak lightly of it.

When I was in Palestine, if I could have found beyond all doubt the very sepulchre of Joseph, in which the Savior was laid away, and where he lay so still until the resurrection morning, I would have prized the sight of it above all that I saw. I would have been glad to go in and stretch myself upon the same bare, rock floor, and to have some friend roll a stone to the mouth of it, that I might realize by imagination my Savior's burial. We can not do that. We are not permitted to do it. But in this ordinance of baptism we are allowed to do the next thing to it. Laid down in a watery grave in obedience to his command, we allow the water to close above our heads, and then, as though we were dead, we are lifted by the strong arm of a servant of God out of that cold grave, and we start to walk in a new life as he started to walk in a new one when he arose from the dead. It is a sacred and a blessed privilege.

When we consider this ordinance in the light of the passages that I have read, we not only see its connection with the burial and resurrection of our Lord, but we instinctively feel that it points us forward to our own death, burial and resurrection. Baptism stands midway in the life of a man who submits to it, very much as one of those old-fashioned guideposts, which we used to see at the cross-roads, with finger-boards pointing this way and that. It stands there with one arm pointing back to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, and the other pointing forward to our own death, our own burial, and our own resurrection. And as it brings us into Christ, unto the forgiveness of our sins, it imparts to us the blessed hope that when we come to be laid in that grave, a strong arm will lift us out of it as we were lifted out of the burial in water.

Can there possibly arise in the heart of any human being, when these things are considered, any repugnance to the ordinance? Any feeling of disrespect toward it? Any other feeling than a most profound reverence for it, and for the God and Savior who appointed it? I am sure there can not.

Is there any one here tonight who desires to submit to it? Oh! my dear friends, you can not be baptized unless you believe in Christ with all your heart. You can not be buried with the Lord in that holy and solemn way unless you have repented of all your sins, have cast them behind you, and have stamped your feet upon the service of the devil. If you have done this, if this is the state of your heart tonight, then it is your privilege to be buried with your Lord in baptism. It is your privilege to be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; to receive the forgiveness of all the sins of

your past life; and to be enabled to walk in a new life -- a life of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Does your heart pant for this? Do you hear the voice of Jesus calling you tonight. Do you aspire to that blessing to which he invites you? Then I beg you to come out, confess the faith which you have in him, and give him your life.

This item originally appeared in McGarvey's Sermons Delivered in Louisville, Kentucky (June-September, 1893)