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STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray R. Sutton

No. 3 Watery Profession

"Then Peter said unto them, **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 Spirit**" (Acts 2:38).

Peter's response raises several questions. Is baptism the cause or effect of the remission of sins? If the cause, does baptism save us? If the effect, then what does baptism have to do with the remission of sins, and why would Peter speak this way? How does repentance fit into the verse? Is it the combination of repentance and baptism that brings forgiveness? Or, does repentance take place at a different time? On and on the questions go, as the church through the ages has struggled to sort out the relationship among faith, baptism, and forgiveness.

Through the maze of solutions, however, we can discern three categories. First, baptism has been viewed as directly connected to faith and forgiveness. Pointing to such passages as Paul's conversion experience, where he was commanded to *be baptized... for the remission of sins* (Acts 22:16), baptismal waters are seen as regenerative (*ex opere operato*). A second group on the other hand sees no relationship between the two. They look to passages like, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned* (Mark 16:16), to point out that only the absence of faith condemns. Thus, baptism has no connection to salvation.

But neither group adequately explains those passages which apparently refute their own positions. At least, it could be said that the attempts are forced. In other words, each interpretation fits one class of verses, but will not cover the verses which apparently say something else. A more accurate handling of the texts involved would present a single interpretation which would cover all the passages. For example, instead of arguing that all the passages teach that baptism and forgiveness either are separated or are indissolubly connected, the Trinitarian paradigm could be applied to clear up the entire matter. It says that certain things in the Bible can be distinguished yet not separated, such as the three Persons of the Trinity, and the deity and humanity of Christ. Applied to baptism, this Trinitarian approach provides a third explanation of the relationship among baptism, faith, and forgiveness.

An interpretation building on the Trinity sees baptism and faith as one act. Several passages indicate the essential oneness, such as "Paul's words about being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and about being buried with Christ through baptism into death (Romans 6:4), the word about saving 'through the washing of regeneration' (Titus 3:5), about the washing of water (Ephesians 5:26), and

Ananias' declaration to Saul (Acts 22:16)" (*The Sacraments*, G. C. Berkouwer, p. 111). The last reference, Acts 22:16, more tellingly indicates the oneness than the others. Ananias said, *be baptized... for the remission of sins as though it were the same as saying believe for the remission of sins*. According to the words of James it was, where he says, *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect*. (James 2:22). So faith is not an empty mental, verbal, or emotional act, but moral. To the men of Scripture, faith is a wholistic act which permeates the complete man. Thus, when a Christian does an act of faith, it is the same as faith, whether it is tithing or loving his children. When Ananias told Paul to be baptized, he really was telling him to believe in the Lord.

Since our present age is one in which the sacraments have been emptied of their meaning, this expression of Ananias is sometimes difficult to see. But it must be remembered that the gospel message is in the sacrament of baptism, and it pictures the complete redemptive work of Christ. Thus baptism is the gospel! So an appropriate response to this watery gospel is to allow it to be placed on the one receiving it. From this explanation, the essential oneness of faith and baptism becomes clearer.

Is this the same as baptismal regeneration? No, and a careful understanding of the concept demonstrates that it is not. Romanism, for example, believes that the water actually contains spiritual power. But the Trinitarian view of baptism sees no power in the water itself. The water pictures the message, in other words, but cannot transfer the reality to the recipient. Behind Rome's view, however, is the belief that power is transmitted to the water through the priest who has received his power from the "true" church. It is interesting that such a position is virtually identical to certain Baptist groups that will not recognize the baptism of other churches. Their reason for such denial is that they are the only "true" church. The logic of this leads them to assert that only one baptized in the "true" church is really saved, a member of the Bride, as opposed to being a mere friend of the Bridegroom. This "Baptist Bride" doctrine indicates that those who try to separate faith from the sacrament, often create that which they attempt to avoid, by their "true" church theology. Therefore, the position that faith and baptism are essentially one is not the same as baptismal regeneration. The Trinitarian position differs over the source of salvation. More importantly, however, it believes that the Bible distinguishes faith from baptism. Thus they are the same yet different.

Scripture says that faith flows from the heart (Romans 10:9-10), not water, and most of the references distinguish faith and baptism even though they are one act. Peter for example, told the crowd at Pentecost to *repent and be baptized* (Acts 2:38). Other references say to believe and be baptized. Furthermore, faith cannot be limited to baptism.

People can be saved without baptism (John 10:18-19), and faith expresses itself in other ways (James 1:23). Thus it is plain to see why the writers of Scripture would speak of faith in a distinguished fashion. But they could also refer to it and baptism as one act. To put it another way, they would speak of baptism as faith. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, "There is in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other" (Chapter 27, section li). As the Trinity is one and inseparable, so is faith and baptism. Such an interpretation clarifies some difficult questions concerning baptism.

One, how does one know when a person is to be baptized? Specifically, how can it be known if *real* faith is present? The church has responded with rational and irrational standards to make this determination. On the one hand, a body of knowledge has been used as a gauge. Some churches have even required whole sections of Scripture to be committed to memory. In the early church, catechism classes were held for new converts. But the problem with this approach is always how much—the Apostles' Creed? the Five Points of Calvinism? the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly? How much should a person know or understand before he is to be classified as having *real* faith?

Another type of standard which has been used by the church is experience. In contrast to the rationalistic approach, these churches have concentrated on testimonies and other experiences. Today, some expect a manifestation of the gift of tongues, or some other ecstatic expression maybe required. But the question is still a qualitative one. How much should a person have experienced? In the late 17th and 18th centuries, the Puritans tried the experiential test and discovered another problem. Some people would learn what type of testimony was expected and tell the officers of the church what they wanted to hear. Instead of reversing the emphasis, churches insisted on deeper experiences. The church has not recovered yet from this age of irrationalism.

Needless to say, these measurements of faith were inadequate. When faith is connected with baptism, however, belief is approached differently. A person comes to baptism to *exercise* faith. When taken this way he immediately "encounters an objective standard, and faith is cast into a different light. It is measured by objective obedience. As far as the church is concerned, it is not so much what one knows or experiences, but what he does. If the church has no discipline, however, this concept of faith and baptism will break down. But that is true with any position. Actually, these alleged ways of ascertaining "real" faith were created because the church failed to implement discipline. It was easy for them to raise subjective standards to sift out the tares before they came into the church. Defining belief objectively by understanding it as being professed in the act of baptism is a better and fairer way. "Real" faith, or reality in general for that matter, is outlined in terms of concrete obedience, and not on the basis of some metaphysical evacuation.

This raises a second question which the Trinitarian interpretation of baptism answers. Can it be said of the person baptized that he is *really* saved? The answer to such a question depends on how *reality* is defined. If reality is explained in terms of some objective standard or morality, the answer to the question is yes. If reality is defined along the metaphysical lines of knowledge and experience the answer is *no*. The irony of the latter approach is that one

can never know or experience enough. Furthermore, sooner or later this pedestal shatters when someone with more knowledge or experience than anyone else falls from the faith. But a more contemporary example can be used. Right now in America one of the leading Calvinists is an unrepentant homosexual. According to the Word of God he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Galatians 5:21). But it would be easy to try and grant him assurance of his eternal destiny on the basis of knowledge and some do. Of course it could be argued that people who comply with external standards can and do fall away also. So the answer to the original questions must be qualified.

God expects us to measure reality by means of His covenant document, the Bible. It contains the terms of the church's treaty with God. Thus, it can be said that reality is defined covenantally. In contrast, a metaphysical view of reality is defined in terms of what man thinks is written in God's eternal decree. But man cannot penetrate God's secret will. Thus God wants man to measure by the plumb line He has provided. This brings the discussion back to objectivity and to the objective signs which God has given, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Of course the Law of God is an extension of union and communion with God, so God's structure of discipline and authority is a part of this. Therefore, the baptized person is to be counted and treated as one who is saved until he demonstrates otherwise. His profession of faith was inescapably made in baptism, whether he realized it at the time or not. As time passes and his watery profession is denied by objective disobedience, then he must be disciplined back to God or out of the church. Church discipline is another subject, but a person can trust in God's seal of promise, baptism. Why else did God give it? Certainly one must comply with all that His seal requires, nevertheless God defined reality in these terms, and so must the Church.

Baptism is a visible form of the Word. It is the gospel in visible form. In baptism the faith is put upon a person, and he is to respond in active personal faith. When God calls His people, the call includes a dictated response, just as God put the words of response into the mouths of His people in Deuteronomy 27. The call, sovereignly administered, includes the response. The church treats those who have been sovereignly called, by holy baptism, as if they had also responded. The gospel is sovereignly applied to the infant, and as he grows up he is to be told that he received the gospel at that time. It is only if he rejects the gospel later on, and apostatizes, that he is to be considered an unbeliever. If a grandfather bestows a gold coin on his grandson at birth, that gold coin is the real possession of the grandson; he does not go through a separate act of receiving the coin at some later time. He received it as a baby. So it is with baptism. God bestows it, and the infant receives it. All he has to do from that point on is to be informed about it, and to cling to it all the days of his life.

Whether the child is truly elect and regenerate or not is something only God knows. Man looks on the outward appearance, and as far as men and the church are concerned, baptism is the infant's watery profession. As far as the child is concerned, he will be saved eternally if he perseveres in the faith. In conclusion, baptism is a profession of faith. As the Persons of the Trinity cannot be separated or confused, so must faith and baptism not be divided or confused. They are one, yet distinguishable. Thus baptism is the objective doorway into the Kingdom of God and in the Words of our Lord, *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* (John 3:5).

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Gary North

No. 3 The Market for Wisdom

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets. She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city she uttereth her words, saying: How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity [simplemindedness] And the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? (Prov. 1:20-22)

It was perhaps the greatest of Greek myths—a myth held mainly by Socrates, Plato, and their followers—that if men understand the truth and the good, they will believe the truth and do the morally upright. Knowledge, in the Greek philosophical tradition, is the pathway to salvation. Knowledge saves.

The Bible affirms that wisdom is the pathway to salvation. But it teaches that wisdom is not a matter of precise logic or intuitive insight. Wisdom is the product of regeneration. The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, when wisdom is proclaimed in the streets, there are few who respond favorably. The simpletons—moral simpletons, not people with low IQ's—do not come and sit at the feet of the wise teacher. “But ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would [have] none of My reproof” (1:25). Simpletons do not take seriously the restraining wisdom of God’s law.

The author of Proverbs personifies wisdom in this passage. He equates wisdom with God. “Then will they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me. For they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD. They would [have] none of My counsel: they despised all My reproof” (1:28-30). The simpletons refused the counsel of God, whose word had been proclaimed in the streets. Now they would face calamity alone; fear, desolation, and destruction was therefore inevitable (1:27).

The market for wisdom was nonexistent. At zero price, there was far more supply than demand. In short, wisdom was a glut on the market. So vast was this glut in relation to demand that the supply would be removed. Wisdom would eventually be sought, but none would be found. God will hide Himself from those who do not regard His Word as valid and valuable, in good times as well as bad. When bad times come, men seek answers, but the wise answers are not to be found by those who are in rebellion against God. They seek but they cannot find. God restricts the easy availability of wisdom in times of crisis when men fail to take Him seriously during prosperous times.

Built into the creation is a cause-and-effect system based on adherence to, or rejection of God’s law. Over and over, we are told that the response of man to the law of God determines his external circumstances. Prosperity is the product of men’s outward adherence to God’s law. Poverty is the result of outward adherence to another law-order, or an anti-law-order. “Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (1:31-43). All societies that reject God’s wisdom have self-destructive aspects.

When the Assyrians came to take Israel away, there was no mass repentance. When the Babylonians came to carry Judah away, there was no mass repentance. Men may have called upon some sort of god—the god of their own creation—but the God of the Bible did not hear them. When the ways of the wicked finally result in the destruction of their prosperity, they are left without moral guidelines. The moral order which they had trusted collapses before their eyes, and they do not know or understand the Biblical alternative.

In the humanist West after the First World War, a wave of debauchery and “high living” swept every nation. Weimar Germany’s café society, America’s speakeasies, the French dada art movement, and Britain’s traditional “muddling through” were all aspects of men’s rejection of pre-war morality which had been at least Christian on the surface. In America, we call this period in retrospect “the Roaring Twenties.” But the roaring twenties turned into the disastrous thirties. Depression broke the backs of the social orders in every nation. Socialists, redistributionists, and populists of all varieties came into power, or close to power, throughout the West. Germany and Italy went fascist-socialist. Britain and the United States went Keynesian, which was basically a form of fascism (as Keynes admitted in his neglected introduction to the German language edition of his *General Theory*, in 1936). The corporate State is still with us, struggling wildly in its death throes desperately trying to find a way to achieve rapid economic growth without price inflation.

The crises of the 1930’s and 1940’s did not lead to repentance in any Western nation. People chased after a number of apparently different economic and political solutions, but they all resembled the Moloch State. Their theology did not change, so their solutions were no better than the problems they were intended to solve. The debauchery of Weimar Germany—the pornography, homosexuality, occultism, and nihilism—has become today’s universal subculture, and is increasingly being absorbed into the common culture of the day. So has Weimar Germany’s policy of monetary inflation. So has the despair. Neither the inflation nor the despair is as great as in Weimar, but the direction in which the West is moving is clear. Weimar ended in tyranny and war.

There is a tendency on the part of deeply ideological groups to work for the destruction of the present world order, the Establishment. The Establishment, in contrast, is desperate to build a new world order by means of its traditional strategies: political manipulation, control over money, government subsidies, and elitist initiation. The ideologues work for social revolution on the assumption that their group may (or in the case of the Communists, will) pick up the pieces. Without the destruction of the present order, they say, there is no hope.

Christians must realize that the market for wisdom is almost always minimal, except in historically rare periods: the late Roman Empire, Europe in the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, and in the New World. The revival of interest in God’s wisdom is abnormal. When societies self-destruct, they are not often replaced by a Christian social order. Christians must work toward the reconstruction of the existing social order, but they must recognize that the market for wisdom is limited today. Their message has not been taken seriously. The distressed masses may run toward new, radical variations of today’s Moloch State. But sometimes the market for wisdom increases. That is our hope—our realistic, but utopian, hope.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

No. 9 The New Covenant Sabbath

"There remains therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9).

The first covenant, called the Old Covenant, was with Adam, and was probationary. It was not a "Covenant of Works," for Adam did labor in faith, just as we do. The content of Adam's faith, however, was slightly but significantly different from that of New Covenant Christians.

Adam was to labor in the faith that his God and Father would give him the strength necessary to fulfill the probation, and enter into the final rest of the New Covenant. We, on the other hand, labor in the faith that Christ has *already fulfilled* the probation, and on that basis we will be given strength to fulfill the covenant ourselves.

The weekly sabbath is the sign of the completed work. Adam's sabbath pointed exclusively to the future when, by grace through faith in God, the work would be finished. Throughout the Old Covenant period, until the resurrection of Christ, the sabbath had this meaning. Christ, however, completed the work, and entered into the eternal and continual sabbath of the New Covenant. The special day is the "shadow", while in Christ is the "substance" (Cd. 217).

It is sensible to draw from this that Christians, being in Christ, are in a continual sabbath. That is indeed the case. The New Covenant sabbath is characteristically continual, and Christians are in this continual sabbath, *by faith*: but not by experience.

In a sense, Christians are still on 'probation'. The New Testament, particularly in the Book of Hebrews (2:1-4; 4:1-11; 6:1-6; 10:26-31; 12:25-29), repeatedly warns Christians to persevere in the faith. There is no automatic salvation. While Christ has fulfilled the probation for cosmic purposes, and the outcome of *history* is no longer in doubt, it is still possible for us *as individuals* to fall and be damned. We cannot succeed in our own probation by relying on our own wisdom and strength, however, as Adam's sore fall graphically displays. Nor do we fulfill our own personal probations through the same faith as Adam should have had, faith in the Word of God generally speaking. No, we fulfill our probations by faith in God in the redemptively-specified sense of faith in the fulfillment of the probation by Christ. We fulfill the probation by participating in Christ's fulfillment of the probation.

Because we are still on probation, the weekly sabbath day still has meaning for us. It now points not only to the future final sabbath of history, but also points to the present continual sabbath enjoyed by Christ.

How can we put this together another way? Perhaps by saying that the New Covenant has been injected into the middle of history in order to make the fulfillment of the Old Covenant's conditions possible. After all, the task of filling and subduing the earth is still before us, but we can only accomplish it in the resurrection power of the New Covenant. The New Covenant, characteristically the covenant of the Seventh Day of history, is inserted on the Third Day (Numbers 19 John 2:19; etc.).

It is a great sin to keep the Old Covenant sabbath. Since, as we have argued, the "creation sabbath" is in part the

Old probationary Covenant sabbath, we are not to keep a pure "creation sabbath" either. To do so is to deny that the probation has been accomplished in Christ. Thus, the New Testament writers repeatedly war against sabbath-keeping *in this sense*, as we have seen in earlier essays in this series.

So then, the question becomes, how do we keep the New Covenant sabbath? I believe the answer is simple: we keep a New Covenant sabbath according to an Old Covenant pattern. This is because we still live in the Old Covenant world. We do not yet have resurrection bodies, nor has the old heavens and earth yet been transfigured into the new, physically speaking. We still have the Old Covenant tasks to perform, and we are still individually on probation.

Thus, the weekly sabbath continues to have ceremonial meaning for us. It reminds us of the continual sabbath that we enjoy by faith in Christ, by heightening our awareness of it. It also reminds us that we are on probation, we have not yet individually attained to the seventh day, and thus we must "be diligent to enter" that rest (Heb. 4:11), just as Christ has already entered it (Heb. 4:10).

The sabbath is no longer an isolated section of kingdom time inserted into a fallen age. The present age is one of continual kingdom time, for Christ is enthroned. As far as the general exercise of faith-rest in Christ is concerned, the Christian is in a continual sabbath by faith, and is thus in continual rest. As far, however, as the special exercise of faith-rest in sacramental worship is concerned, Christians still alternate between times of special worship and times of general kingdom labor. The pattern of these special times is set out in all of Scripture as one day in seven, and theologically is keyed to the resurrection of Christ. The church, therefore, has always kept a New Covenant sabbath on the Lord's Day.

The Christian can have security in this world, but only a security by faith in Christ. At the same time, the Christian is on probation, called to persevere. The Christian must attain to his perpetual sabbath rest, just as Christ has already attained to His. The Christian labors to attain this by exercising sabbath-faith in the completed work of Christ. Thus, the sabbath continues to have an absolutely essential symbolic meaning for the Christian: it symbolizes to him that his labor perseverance is not yet completed, and it simultaneously symbolizes to him that he can persevere only through faith in Christ's sabbathing. The Christian dare not presume to live in a perpetual sabbath *in the special sense*, for that would be to assert that he need not persevere, and that the threats of Hebrews and other New Testament books are not real. No, no! Those threats are very real, and so the weekly sabbath remains a sign to man that he must persevere in faith, and finish his work.

In summary, the Christian affirms two things. First, that he is in a perpetual sabbath, because Christ has completed His labor, and because the present kingdom age is an age of perpetual sabbath in a *general* sense. Second, however, he affirms that he is not in a perpetual sabbath, because he has not personally and individually finished his labor and persevered to the end in faith, and because only the future consummation age will be an age of perpetual sabbath in the *special* sense.

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