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Water Baptism and the Church

In the

First Century.

(2013)

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Water Baptism and the Church in the First Century.

Topics.

- Water baptism in the first century.
- The old man and the new man.
- Being submerged in water does not guarantee acceptance by God.
- Water baptism and marriage.
- Works, faith and water baptism.
- The global and worldwide church of God.
- The global family of Christ.

Water Baptism in the First Century.

Throughout the first century the church administered water baptism immediately on heartfelt repentance and an honest profession of faith.

Peter proclaimed the message of the cross and the Lord Jesus Christ and three thousand were so cut to the heart they repented and were water baptized that same day in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:35-41). The Philippian jailer, Paul, the Corinthians and the Ethiopian eunuch were all water baptized without delay.

Baptism was administered on profession of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. water baptism washes a sinner clean from sin and not only delivers the baptized man or woman from the domain of darkness and transfers them into the Kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13), but also transfers them into a new community in which he or she shares a common life with all those who belong to the family of Christ.

Those who held fast to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and belonged to the Kingdom of Christ became known as those who belonged to the WAY.

Every faithful brother and sister in Christ lived their life in the presence of God and tried to live in a manner that brought honour to God and a good testimony to the name of Jesus in everything they did. Christians during the apostle's generation were intimately related to each other in bonds of duty, obligation and love. They shared what they were able to with each other and cared for the poor.

The baptismal life not only involved brotherly Christian love toward each other, a common community spirit, right living before God and doing-good to those within the Kingdom of the God and those who do not yet know the love and Grace of God, but also embraced worship, Christian fellowship and instruction and teaching of the Lord's word.

The early converts continued in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers and with one accord they bore their testimony to Jesus.

- Jesus said: Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

The common bond between these brothers and sisters was not doctrine from Genesis to Revelation, but the love of the Lord Jesus Christ that he displayed toward them on the cross of Calvary and the foundation of their knowledge was the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of the Cross. Consider the following if their fellowship was based upon having the same knowledge from Genesis to Revelation these brothers and sisters would never have gotten together.

They had Jews who had been indoctrinated in Moses Law for around four thousand years and Gentiles whose faith involved the belief in pagan gods and others who knew nothing of God at all.

The foundation of their fellowship was the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and upon this foundation they grew together in the fruits of the Spirit and greater knowledge of the Scriptures.

Faithful brothers and sisters who did gather together during this era not only had to show great love, mercy and grace toward each other for their failings in flesh, but also great love, mercy and grace toward each other for their differences in intellectual knowledge.

This type of fellowship can only come about when humbleness is exalted amongst the group and the desire to understand God's word is more important than protecting our own pride and ego.

This was perhaps easier for them to achieve for the following two reasons: -

- The early church was in the homes of faithful brothers and sisters.
- The Christian faith was new so all were growing together rather than having one dominant and authoritative man as head of the congregation.

No one would have surrendered their mind to another because all were new to the faith, so all would have been learning from each other and it is certain when there was a Scriptural difficulty they all did their own study and then gathered together to share their notes. In this manner of fellowship no one man could lead an entire church astray.

Obviously when they had men of Paul's gifted knowledge and others like him passing through their region they invited them to stay in their homes to learn from them, but even Paul with his great knowledge and personal encounter with the Lord commended brothers and sisters for not just accepting something to be true simply because he spoke it.

When Paul went into a Jewish Synagogue at Berea it is stated: -

- That the Jews in that Synagogue were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they received the word with all eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11).

Sadly in certain churches today if the teaching of man at the head of the congregation is questioned those who question his teaching are accused of being rebels or even worse maybe told to leave the church. Added to this if a group amongst the congregation gathered together to examine what had been spoken they would most likely be disciplined by the elders of that particular church and told to dis-abandon their meetings if they wanted to remain members.

This is not how the early church functioned, nor is it how our churches should function today, pride and ego should be left outside the door of the church and no one should be immune (no matter how important they maybe) from having what they teach being examined by others especially by those who are faithfully follow them and most likely financially supporting them.

Since most churches were in the homes of faithful brothers and sisters (there is no mention of church buildings in the New Testament) it would have been easy for them to examine Scriptural difficulties together in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

Sadly in many cases today where the teaching of those in authority is brought into question they are either so indoctrinated or prideful that rather than sit down and have a friendly conversation, the spirit of self-defence rises up and their ears are deaf to hear what others maybe trying to say.

Various Notes Concerning Water Baptism.

The practise and teaching of water baptism by the apostles and those that followed is seen in the Scriptures spanning over 70 years from the beginning of the gospels in 30 AD to the final book of Revelation around 100 AD.

Water baptism is taught in the following books: -

Acts ----- 30 AD

1 Corinthians ----- 54-55 AD

2 Corinthians and Romans ----- 57 AD

Ephesians and Colossians ----- 62 AD

1 Peter ----- 64-100 AD

Titus ----- 65-66AD

Hebrews and 2 Peter ----- 67-69 AD

Revelation ----- 90-96 AD

Through the entire book of Acts (30 AD to 100 AD) the apostles and those that followed were faithful to the command of Jesus Christ to go into all the world and water baptise repentant believers into the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit and make disciples of them.

There are numerous New Testament examples that show that baptism in water was a practise attended to by all who believed' the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in early times. What was necessary or appropriate for the first Christians is just as necessary and appropriate for Christians today.

The Old Man and the New Man.

The outward act of water baptism evidences an inward decision of the heart and mind to put off of the old man (Adam's nature) and a put on the new man (Christ's nature). Jesus is the one covering name by which the naked son and daughter of Adam are majestically covered in royal robes of righteousness so that when they stand before God they are not only seen as being righteous, but also approved of in His sight.

Being Submerged in Water Does Not Guarantee Acceptance by God.

Every believer should clearly understand that acceptance by God it is not brought about by the mere act of being submerged in water this is because water baptism in itself has no religious virtue whatever if it is not mixed with faith. The act of water baptism is only recognised by God when it is performed in connection with an intelligent understanding of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of the cross and with an affectionate belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Water Baptism and Marriage.

Water baptism could be likened to a marriage and a single man or woman in the following way. They find a partner, listen to them and learn all they can about that person. If over time they begin to love that person a change of heart takes place and they desire to make a life-long commitment to that person.

They seal that commitment and testify to the world by marriage that they are now prepared to live a new life with the one they deeply love and make them supreme in their heart, mind and life in all that they do.

Those seeking God listen to the Gospel and the message of the Cross and the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, if they love what they hear and believe it and begin to taste the love and grace of God toward them a change of heart begins to takes place.

They have a heartfelt desire to commitment their life to Christ. To seal that commitment and testify to the world and to God that they are now prepared to live a new life with Christ as supreme in their heart, mind and life in all that do as they enter the waters baptism. In a natural marriage the bride enters into a new life united together with her bridegroom. Even though the bride not only loves her bridegroom and is fully committed to him long before the marriage ceremony, she cannot say she is married to him until she has made that legal and binding commitment to him.

Water Baptism is very similar in that those being baptized even though they already love their Bridegroom and are fully committed to him they cannot stand before God with a clear conscience and say that they belong to the Kingdom of God until by faith they have gone down into the waters of baptism and risen up out of them into Christ and his global and eternal family.

Works, Faith and Water Baptism.

There are religious leaders today who say that water baptism' is not necessary for salvation, because people are saved by faith and not works. They class water baptism as a work (i.e., something a person can do to earn salvation). Certainly it is true that we are all saved by grace through faith and not by self-effort and works and that salvation is a free gift of God and it is true that there is no work of the flesh a person can do to earn or to make the flesh worthy of salvation, but water baptism is not a work of the flesh, but an act of faith and obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ commanded his apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Entering into the waters baptism is an act obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ and an outward evidence of faith that is dwelling in the heart and mind. Only when faith and a heartfelt devotion toward the Lord Jesus Christ is absent from the act of water baptism could it be classed as an act of works.

The entire act of entering the waters of baptism is an act of faith and not works, if it is simply works the person being baptized is simply taking a dunk in some water, but when a man or woman enters the waters of baptism with the following faith and heartfelt belief that through faith in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ they are: -

- Being fully obedient to the Lords command.
- Identifying with Christ's death, burial and resurrection.
- Being washed clean of all sin.
- Entering into the Kingdom of God and the global and eternal family of Christ.

If faith is not involved in this entire process water baptism is just another dip in a pool, but when a person has devotion toward Christ and understands what water baptism means it is a very spiritual experience.

A PERSONAL NOTE: to those who desire to be baptized forget who is baptizing you, forget what church you belong to (if any) forget what your family members, secular friends or work colleagues may think because none of these things mean anything to God. This spiritual experience of faith is solely between you and Christ and no one else he is the only one your mind and heart should be looking toward as you are immersed into the waters of baptism and rise up out of them.

Jesus says: -

- There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7).
- There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).

The Global and Worldwide Church of God.

There is in the secular global world today a mindset that the church is a Sunday meeting in a religious building but the church should never be limited to the established religious institutions, denominations or church buildings though they may form a part of the body of Christ they are not the only part.

There are many individual Christians in all countries of the world who meet in coffee bars, social outings and mostly their own homes (as the early church did) to give thanks to Christ and share their discoveries of God's word and their spiritual experiences with Him. Many of these people are helping others and simply manifesting the reality of their faith to the people that come into their lives.

God is not limited to any one pattern or organisation; He is far too creative for that. Jesus church is global and is manifested in a vast variety of ways across the face of the earth. In many third world countries church is held outside under a tree (for shade) with its members sitting on the dusty ground often with dogs, chooks and other animals roaming around.

It is also important to be aware that the word church does not embrace everyone simply because they confess to be Christians (Matt 7:21-23). When the Bible uses the term church it primarily refers to those who belong to Christ and those who do the will of his Father.

The will of God in this context is: -

- Loving your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:37-39) (Mark 12:29-31).

In the New Testament this is called the, royal law (James 2:8) and means do good to others. Those who deliberately harm people (especially those who belong to Christ) physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally or spiritually and those who use others for their own selfish gain and greed are referred to by Christ himself as workers of iniquity.

The Bible teaches that some will be cast out of God's Kingdom which means not everyone who confesses to know Christ is part of his church there are those in his present Kingdom who he calls wicked servants. They use his name and his gospel for their own selfish gain and line their own greedy pockets with the wealth and riches of this world by making merchandise of those who do belong to Christ.

Nevertheless Jesus knows those who are his and those who are not and will not only reject anyone who uses his message of grace, mercy, compassion and love for their own selfish gain, but when he returns will deny them entry into his eternal Kingdom. (Matt 8:12) (Matt 22:13) (Matt 25:30).

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,
but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep
hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.
(John 10:14) (John 10:26-27).

Building God's church is not about financing opulent mega million dollar buildings, but rather about people gathering together to share their faith in any place they are able, nevertheless a building maybe required for practical purposes (i.e., the size of the congregation, protection from weather etc.), but if it is built from cleverly distorting Scriptures to manipulate money from faithful believers and by making them feel guilty if they don't give and borrowing such vast amounts of money that not only the oversight of that church, but also the congregation are put under financial oppression it is not in the will of God.

Building God's church is about becoming more Christ like, and living in the will of God. New Testament Christianity is fluid and not restricted to a particular building or even a special day.

The Christianity Christ taught is so rewarding and real, it cannot be contained. It has no limitations and overflows into every moment of a Christian's life, thus the New Testament church is global, moving and manifested in the lives of all those who are faithful and who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Global Family of Christ.

Since the Bible was written in an entirely different culture to ours and the body of Christ is a global family filled with people from different nations, countries, cultures, backgrounds, different levels of knowledge and education (especially religious) and its members are filled with various hurts and troubled pasts there is always going to be a certain amount of Scripture we will all understand differently.

Paul in the book of Romans tells us to avoid those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine that he taught the brothers and sisters in Rome, but in the context of his letter the doctrines he has in mind are: -

1. Doctrines that are contrary to the teaching that salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ contrasted to works of the law, self-effort and keeping religious customs and traditions etc.
2. Doctrines that are contrary to the truth that Jews and Gentiles who accept Christ become one nation in Christ, contrasted to them being two separate nations.
3. Doctrines that are contrary to godly behaviour and lead people away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are the three major topics Paul has focused on in his letter to the brothers and sisters in Rome and the doctrines he has in his mind when he says be careful of those who cause divisions and create obstacles.

Naturally within the global family of Christ there are many varied understandings of many Scripture, but not all teachings are important to know to be saved to eternal life nor does one have to have perfect understanding of every teaching of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to know Christ and be in union with him, but they must understand the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

No-one has to be a walking Bible encyclopaedia to be in the family of Christ and saved to eternal life, but should any teacher proclaim a message of works and self-effort to be saved or teach that Jews and Gentiles are two separate groups/nations in Christ, or teach doctrines that lead people away from God's grace, away from godly behaviour and away from Christ Paul says they should be avoided (Rom 16:17-19).

NOTE: though the visible global church in many regions has not presented a good reflection of Christ to the secular world, it should always be remembered that there are literally hundreds of thousands of humble Christian brothers and sisters in Christ spending their time helping the poor and the less fortunate, but sadly this type of news does not attract the attention of global T.V. or the world news since there is no profit to be made in good news.

The body is the reflection of Christ on earth and therefore those who belong to it
should be walking in the same Spirit of love, kindness, compassion
and grace etc., that Christ walked in while on earth.

End