

The Great Baptism Battle

By Louis Rushmore

"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" (Romans 6:3-5).

There may be no more controversial biblical topic among *Bible-believers* than "baptism." However, we need to be honest about what the New Testament teaches about baptism, despite what our theological leanings may be. For instance, one preacher, who had a preference for what he styled *spirit baptism*, affirmed that the phrase "like figure" in 1 Peter 3:21 means "opposite to." He arrived at that inescapably erroneous conclusion to distance "baptism" in the passage from "water" in the preceding verse. That type of conduct is not being honest with the Holy Word of God, with himself or anyone else he may influence. We have to do better than that if we are to be enlightened and enriched by God's Word.

More New Testament passages address baptism than any other facet of the Lord's redemptive plan. This represents **divine anticipation** that baptism more than any other part of God's plan for our salvation would be assaulted. Similarly, any besieged fort will see the greatest concentration of defenders mustered precisely at the point most fiercely under attack. Numerous aspects of Bible baptism could be addressed because of the more than ample biblical material about baptism, but we will direct our attention just now to three considerations: Bible baptism is immersion in water, Bible baptism is for the remission of sins and only Bible baptism correctly cleanses one's conscience from sins.

Bible baptism for today is in *water*. The apostle Paul announced that one baptism remained from Ephesians 4:5 onward. The apostle Peter identified that baptism as water baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21).

Many passages allude to baptism as immersion but stop short of stating precisely that. John the Baptist baptized where there was "much water" (John 3:23). The baptizer and the baptized both went down into and came up out of the water of baptism in Acts 8:38-39.

Two passages state in so many words that Bible baptism is immersion. Baptism is compared to the death and **burial** of Christ, i.e., a watery grave (Romans 6:3-4). The apostle Paul penned the same message to the Colossian Christians (Colossians 2:12). Further, Paul styled Bible baptism as a **planting** into the death of Christ (Romans 6:5).

It is no wonder, then, passages that allude to immersion mesh perfectly with immersion and are antagonistic to pouring and sprinkling under the guise of baptism. Though the Greek words for *baptize* and *baptism* literally mean to immerse, our English translations are sufficient to uphold Bible baptism as immersion.

Bible baptism is for the remission of sins. The phrase "for the remission of sins" does not mean, as some claim, "because of the remission of sins." Peter in Acts 2:38 stated in the first recorded Gospel sermon in his **command** to be baptized that baptism was for the remission of sins. In a similar passage, Jesus speaking, he was **not** about to be crucified 'because we already had the remission of sins,' but so that mankind could obtain the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). The two verses read so nearly alike that one cannot come to an erroneous conclusion regarding the purpose of baptism in Acts 2:38 without demolishing the significance of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross in Matthew 26:28.

Other passages associate baptism with forgiveness of sins, too. The baptism that Peter said was for the remission of sins, he wrote in 1 Peter 3:21 that it **saves**. Saul of Tarsus (better known to us as the apostle Paul) was instructed to wash away his sins in baptism (Acts 22:16).

Hence, Bible baptism is a matter of **urgency**, since Scripture connects it with forgiveness. Therefore, we are not surprised that candidates for baptism chose to be baptized **immediately**. The Philippian jailer was baptized in the middle of the night (Acts 16:33). The Ethiopian treasurer was baptized along the way in a long journey (Acts 8:26-40).

Bible baptism correctly cleanses the conscience. Humanly devised schemes of redemption cannot save souls. Man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). God will not accept human plans of salvation at the Judgment (Matthew 7:21-23). Therefore, humanly devised schemes of redemption cannot correctly cleanse the conscience of sin.

Former divine laws were never intended nor could they cleanse the conscience of sin. Patriarchy (beginning with Adam) provided nothing more than atonement and the **promise** of future redemption (Genesis 12:1-3). Judaism was incapable of cleansing the conscience from sin (Hebrews 10:1-4). Therefore, the apostle Paul taught that anyone resorting to the Law for salvation is lost (Galatians 3:11; 5:4). Bible baptism, under the New Testament, does cleanse the sinner's conscience. The parenthetical expression in 1 Peter 3:21 attributes to baptism the capacity to cleanse the human conscience. The apostle Peter contrasts the outward appearance of baptism (a bath or physical cleansing) with its real purpose (an inner, spiritual cleansing). Bible baptism cleanses the conscience because it is a burial into the death of Christ for the **remission of sins**.

Bible baptism is immersion in water for the remission of sins. Only immersion in water for the remission of sins (in conjunction with other elements to which the Bible attributes saving power) can correctly cleanse the sinner's conscience of sin. All other baptisms and all other reasons for which people propose to be baptized neither save souls nor correctly cleanse the human conscience.

It is either Bible baptism, immersion in water for the remission of sins, or it is not truly baptism at all. Have you been baptized for the remission of sins? It is an urgent matter!