



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Baptism: Some Questions of Practice

David Anguish

### *Introduction*

1. Monroe Hawley tells the following:

Soon after I started working with a congregation in a large midwestern city a young man from another area moved to our community and began assembling with us. Following the morning worship, he came to me with a concerned expression. "Brother Hawley," he inquired, "is it scriptural to have the Lord's supper before the sermon rather than after it?" He had never before seen the sacred feast observed in the early part of the worship period. When I assured him that God's word does not specify the precise order of worship he was satisfied and so far as I know never again troubled about the matter.<sup>1</sup>

2. What prompted his question? Hawley explains: "I have no reason to believe that he had been taught that partaking of the communion must follow the 'sermon' since I later worked with his home congregation and never heard anyone there so affirm. His question was prompted, not by teaching, but by an unvarying practice which he came to equate with the law of God."

3. Hawley goes on to say, "Most of us do not realize the extent to which customs fasten themselves on us." Based on personal experience and observation, I would agree.

- Sometimes, as in the case of Hawley's questioner, the person realizes that he has assumed a tradition must be law and moves on when he correctly comes to understand differently.
- Sometimes, people are more resistant, requiring considerable study and time to work their way through the urge to bind what is merely traditional and customary.
- Then, there are times when a custom becomes so embedded in one's thinking—or a congregation's—that people come to believe that the custom really is equal to divine writ.

4. There are a number of areas where this occurs, of course. My interest in this study is with a couple of specific questions regarding the practice of baptism.

### *Body*

I. Does it matter what the one baptizing says?

- I've heard criticism for not saying the "right thing" when immersing someone.

---

<sup>1</sup> Monroe E. Hawley, *Redigging the Wells: Seeking Undenominational Christianity*, 158.

- B. As far as I could tell, this view came from one of two lines of thought.
1. As in the case reported by Hawley, some believe a certain formula must be repeated because of repetition—that's how they've always heard it; this may be more of a problem in cases where people have pretty much been in one church all their lives.
  2. Whether to justify defending that tradition, because it's been understood for so long that some have tied a reference to it and used it as their proof, or for some other reason, some have made an effort to find the formula in a New Testament text.
    - a) Matthew 28:19-20 has been suggested by some.
      - (1) The text does teach that those who are made disciples are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
      - (2) The question is whether this is a formula to be spoken at baptism or a way to differentiate Christian baptism from alternatives (e.g., John's baptism).
    - b) Some things that must be considered as we think about this passage.
      - (1) The phrase "in the name of" is used elsewhere as a synonym for establishing authority—e.g., salvation "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 4:10-12) and doing all things "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).
      - (2) If it is necessary at baptism to say that it is in "the name of the Father, Son and Spirit" (and can we abbreviate Matthew 28:19?), then why is it not necessary to *say* every time someone is saved that it is in "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," or every time we serve him (or worship him) that we are doing it "in the name of the Lord Jesus"?
    - c) We have evidence of this point from two passages featuring Paul.
      - (1) In Acts 19:1-7, Paul encountered twelve disciples in Ephesus who had not heard there was a Holy Spirit, an admission that prompted him to ask about their baptism. Learning that they had submitted only to John's baptism, he corrected them and they were baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus."
      - (2) In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Paul challenged the schisms in Corinth by reminding them that they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, not Paul (or Cephas or Apollos). His point was to stress authority, not the formula recited.
    - d) If the phrase "in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit" is intended to be a formula, then the preachers in Acts (or at least Luke) seem to have missed the point. Repeatedly, Acts reports that they were baptized "in the name of Jesus," not "the Father, Son, and Spirit" (see Acts 2:38; 8:12, 16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16).<sup>2</sup>
  3. What should we conclude?
    - a) Since there is no declaration or example of what the one baptizing says, we can say that Scripture does not speak to the matter.
    - b) If the point of saying something is to remind the one being baptized of the purpose, or (more likely) to declare it for others who might be present, then it seems that a statement involving any (or all!) Scriptural purposes would be in order.

---

<sup>2</sup> None of these references addresses what a baptizer *said* when baptizing. Of interest is that Acts 22:16 tells us that, at baptism, Paul was told to "call on his name." The verb "call" describes what the one *being* baptized is to do, not the one who is doing the baptizing. Even then, the concern is not about a ritualistic formula. The aorist tense participle, "calling," refers to the fact that Paul's submission to baptism in surrender to Jesus amounted to what was needed to call on his name, and so be saved. The text essentially parallels Acts 2:21.

- c) The New Testament's silence would suggest that nothing need be said; that might make some uncomfortable, but is not contrary to Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Does the validity of one's baptism depend on the one who does the baptizing?

### A. Some have wondered about the qualification of the one doing the baptizing.

1. The question has sometimes been raised in terms of faithfulness and hypocrisy.<sup>4</sup>
  - a) "What about my baptism since the one who baptized me has left the faith?"
  - b) "Can a sinner ever baptize a person?"
2. Others have focused on what the one baptizing believed about salvation, the church, etc., e.g., is one's baptism valid if the one baptizing does not believe baptism is necessary for entering newness of life (Romans 6:3-4) or putting on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27)?
3. Does the Bible set forth any qualifications for the baptizer?

### B. Origins of the question.

1. The question arises among some because of formal teaching they have received.
  - a) Some believe apostolic succession, "the doctrine maintaining that present-day successors to Jesus's apostles, i.e. the bishops, have the same spiritual authority, power, and responsibility conferred upon them as did the original apostles."<sup>5</sup>
  - b) "Did the authority of the Apostles die with them? No, they handed down their authority to others since Jesus wanted His church to last until the end of the world."<sup>6</sup>
  - c) Whether formally stated or not, this view is assumed by many in our world, accustomed as they are to everything in a church running through the Pastor.
2. Some have doubtless formed their view because of what they have seen practiced.
  - a) In most churches, the one preaching tends to do (most of) the baptizing.
  - b) Over time, this custom may be interpreted by some to mean that the preacher *must* do the baptizing.
    - (1) In recent years, we have seen more cases where others (e.g., dads) have done the baptizing, leading to a better understanding.
    - (2) We know, too, that sometimes people want a preacher to baptize them as a sign of respect or in light of their relationship with him (just as others want someone else to immerse them for the same reasons).

### C. Scripture and sense point to the conclusion that there are no qualifications for baptizers.

1. Some Scriptural considerations.
  - a) In 1 Corinthians 1:11-17, Paul feared that some would connect baptism with the baptizer, thus fostering the partyism in Corinth; accordingly, he de-emphasized the importance of the one doing the baptizing (see *ἵνα, hina*, in v 15).
  - b) Paul himself had been baptized by "a disciple at Damascus named Ananias" (Acts 9:10, 18; 22:16). We have no way to know who baptized Ananias.

<sup>3</sup> Of incidental interest is the fact that preacher students have generally not been instructed about what to say. Given our fellowship's emphasis on baptism's importance, it is hard to believe that, if something should be said, teachers would not have made sure to stress it.

<sup>4</sup> See Felton Spraggins, "Does Baptism Depend on the Administrator?" *Study Echoes: Sermons, Class Notes, Articles*, V: 29.

<sup>5</sup> apostolic succession. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon*. Dictionary.com, LLC. [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apostolic succession](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apostolic%20succession) (accessed: August 22, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> William J. Cogan, *A Catechism for Adults*, 53, in Spraggins, 29.

- c) Since the apostles remained in Jerusalem as the church spread through Samaria and Syria (Acts 8:1, 4, 5, 12; 11:19-21), we know they did not do the baptizing.<sup>7</sup>
  - d) The expectation that we must be baptized demands that someone administer the baptism, but Scripture leaves it as a generic issue, never specifying who the baptizer must be.
2. Some practical considerations.
- a) "If we take the position that the baptizer must possess certain qualifications to baptize, then every person's baptism will come into question" (Spraggins, 30).
    - (1) To what extent do we then need to investigate our baptizer to be sure he is qualified? And what sins would disqualify him?
    - (2) But there's more: what if his baptizer was unqualified? Are we prepared to try to establish a qualified line of baptizers all the way back to Peter?
3. The validity of baptism rests in one's response to the Word of God.
- a) One baptized according to the Word's teaching has received a valid baptism.
  - b) This is so even if the person baptizing is wrong about another doctrine, ten other doctrines, or a hundred other doctrines.

### *Conclusion*

1. Two take-aways from our study:
- a. We must be diligent to base what we believe in that which conforms to the teaching of Scripture, not what others say or do, and not what we have repeatedly experienced.
  - b. Biblical baptism depends on a person's obedience to what the Word of God teaches about baptism.
2. Several texts show us what that teaching is: in order to be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), in order to enter newness of life (Romans 6:3-4), so that we can be in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), for compliance with God's work in transferring us to the ranks of the saved (1 Peter 3:21) and regenerated (Titus 3:5). We stand ready to help you complete your obedience to Christ.

*August 23, 2009*  
*www.davidanguish.com*

---

<sup>7</sup> Significantly, when the apostles Peter and John were sent to assist with these ministries, it was not to baptize, but to give the special measure of the Spirit to believers who had already been baptized by Phillip (Acts 8:14-15).