

# Baptism

*by Albert A. Smith*

*"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 Ghost." - Acts 2: 38.*

We are told that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established (Matthew 18: 16). We are also told, "To the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8: 20). Very well:

## **Let the Witnesses Testify**

The first witness is John: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" (John 1:6). John's testimony is explicit: "he . . . sent me to baptize with water" (John 1: 33).

The second witness is Peter. The disciples were commanded to tarry at Jerusalem until they were "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24: 49). On the day of Pentecost, fully endowed with this power, Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2: 38).

The third witness is Paul. It was said of Paul, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9: 15)

This special witness to the Gentiles, for our benefit, names baptism as one of the six cardinal principles of the gospel (Hebrews 6:1,2).

The fourth witness is Philip. He was a "preacher of Jesus." He was commanded of the angel to go on a Certain mission (Acts 8: 26). Seeing an Ethiopian, a eunuch of great authority, he was commanded of the Spirit to go and preach the gospel to this man (verse 29). This man, having heard Jesus preached, said: "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest" (Acts 8: 36, 37). "And they went down both, into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." - Acts 8: 38.

The fifth witness is Ananias, described as "a devout man according to the law, having a good report." At Paul's conversion he was told by the Master to go to Damascus, and there "it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9: 6). Ananias coming to Paul said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). That was what Paul "must do" to be saved.

The sixth witness is Jesus Christ, the Lord, of whom the Father said, "Hear ye him." His testimony must stand, and he it was who said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16: 16). He also said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them" (Matthew 28: 19). He himself was baptized in the river Jordan, and he says to us, "Take up the cross, and follow me" (Mark 10: 21).

Our first glimpse of him as a man was on the bank of the river Jordan, where he was baptized. We catch our last view of him before his ascension where he is saying to his apostles, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

The last great witness is God the Father. When Jesus was baptized the heavens were opened and God said, "I am well pleased" (Mark 1: 11). Do you wish to please God? We ought to please God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

## **The Mode of Baptism**

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead . . . so we also should walk in newness of life." - Romans 6:4. If a few grains of sand were sprinkled upon your coffin no one would consider you buried. There is no misunderstanding the figure used. So we may understand why it was that "John also was baptizing in Xenon near to Salim, because there was much water there" (John 3: 23).

The historic form of baptism was by immersion. For two or more centuries after Christ it was practically the universal mode. Finally in rare instances sick people were sprinkled, which method in such instances had sanction by the pope in A.D. 754. But it was not until A.D. 1311 that the Council at Ravenna authorized a change. The Question Box, by Bertrand L. Conway of the Paulist Fathers, published by the Paulist Press, with preface by Cardinal Gibbons, says: "The Catholic Church, therefore, as the infallible interpreter of the gospel of Jesus Christ, declares that all three ways of baptizing are equally valid, by immersion, by pouring, or by sprinkling.

The present mode of pouring arose from the many inconveniences connected with immersion, frequent mention of which is made in the writings of the early Catholic Fathers." For thirteen hundred years immersion was the accepted method. This change in the mode of baptism fulfills one scriptural description of apostasy (Isa. 24: 5). It would call into serious question the authority of those thus administering the ordinance.

We feel that the pattern indicated by Jesus and the apostles is the only correct form of baptism. Considering the historic mode and the scriptural statement that Christ came "up out of the water" (Mark 1: 10), there is no doubt at all that he was immersed. "The servant is not greater than his master." Who am I to hesitate on the bank and quibble? Let me follow him into the stream. "They that gladly received his word were baptized." - Acts 2:41.

### **The Significance of Baptism**

Man has always used symbols. The wedding ring, the crown, the scepter, prostration in prayer, these and a thousand other ancient material or ceremonial symbols come to mind. God recognizes that trait and speaks to man in a language that he can understand. Baptism is a symbol of cleansing. All can understand it. Man has always cleansed his body with water, and though water cannot actually touch the spirit or cleanse it, it becomes a symbol of spiritual cleansing.

Ananias, sent of God, understood this perfectly and said, 'Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins' (Acts 22: 16). Baptism by immersion in water is a beautiful symbol. It is ruined by any changes. Why change what God gave?

### **Baptism a Beginning**

Baptism is the door to the kingdom. Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"(John 3: 5). There is one baptism: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4: 5). But this one baptism is dual in its nature - baptism of the water and of the Spirit, as Jesus said. If the baptism in water is important and vital as a symbol of cleansing, certainly the baptism of the Spirit is even more important, but baptism in water is the prelude and prepares the way by cleansing for the Spirit to enter in, as we are told that the Spirit will not dwell in unholy temples.

Jesus, in the passage quoted, clearly associates the two, water and the Spirit. Peter, endowed with power, on the day of Pentecost said, "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 Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." - Acts 2: 38, 39.

Baptism is the prelude to a new clean life in Christ Jesus: "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." - Romans 6: 4.

## **Conclusion**

We cannot conclude with any better exhortation than that found in the Scriptures: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Baptism is one of six fundamental gospel principles taught in the Scriptures ( Hebrews 6: 1, 2), and believed in by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.