

# A COMING ISSUE IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

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That the world is passing through a crisis no fair minded person will deny. And, as in most of its crises, religious teachings come in for their share of examination if not extermination. Usually in a crisis some particular teaching becomes the center of attack. For instance, in the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith was the issue.

Bible Institutes in our country seem to be helping in the rising of a certain issue by remaining silent on certain doctrines. For example, among the Articles of Faith mentioned by three of the most prominent Bible schools in the country, not one has a word to say about WATER BAPTISM. Which are we to understand by their silence on this doctrine: (1) that it is unimportant, or (2) that it is not to be taught at all? Surely we would expect Bible Institutes to take some kind of a stand on this matter if it is for the Church today, wouldn't we? That this matter is well on the road to becoming a real issue is further evidenced by the attitude of some preachers today. We hear again and again of preachers challenging one another to debate the subject of WATER BAPTISM, which proves that this subject is beginning to press itself on the minds of the Church for an answer. May the Lord guide us in our attempt to, find the truth concerning this matter.

A discussion of this subject usually begins with John the Baptist. But, let us remember that when we turn to the record by Matthew we are UNDER LAW. In Matthew 3:1 and 2 we read: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND." Then in Matthew 3:5 and 6 we read, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Following this we have the record of the baptism of Jesus. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." This is indeed an important statement. Note especially these words, "for thus." That is, by this act, He the King of Israel and the Saviour of the world; was to IDENTIFY Himself with sinning humanity. Not that He was a sinner, for He was not, but "thus" He was "numbered with the transgressors," and "thus". He predicted His own DEATH-BAPTISM and RESURRECTION.

After His baptism He was anointed by the Spirit for His work. Then after conquering Satan in the wilderness He began His public ministry. We read in Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND." In Matthew 4:23, "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the KINGDOM, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." This was followed in Matthew 5 through 7 by His Sermon on the Mount, which is the record of the platform program of His KINGDOM.

Then, after He had proven to the Jews that He was from Heaven, and that He would establish His Kingdom on other principles than they expected, He called unto Him His twelve disciples. "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not unto the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the HOUSE OF ISRAEL. And as ye go, preach, saying, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils." (Matthew 10:5 to 8).

Soon after this He announced to the chief of the twelve, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee (Peter) the keys (authority) of the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. . . . Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ." (Matthew 16:18 to 20).

The next baptism mentioned by Jesus was His death-baptism. When the mother of Zebedee's children asked, "That these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy KINGDOM," Jesus answered, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" He also referred to this death-baptism in Luke 12:50, when He said, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

After the Lord's RESURRECTION He commissioned the ELEVEN to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU." Now most of us have been taught that this Commission is for the Church today and that we should obey it. But if the obeying of it means to go teach all nations baptizing them, what about the observing "ALL THINGS whatsoever I have commanded you?" Did he not command them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, etc.? Is the Church doing these things today? Some say "Yes" and some say "No." Then if not, why not? Here is where the real problem begins. Sir Robert Anderson, a great English preacher, says, "That this was not acted on by the apostles is clear to every student of the Acts. It directed them to go out and make disciples of the Gentiles whereas they preached to Jews only. A special vision was necessary to get Peter to visit Cornelius. In Acts 15 none of the apostles referred to this commission, and there is no mention in the Acts of any case of baptism in the name of the Trinity. The late Dr. Gray of the Moody Bible Institute writes in his Christian Worker's Commentary, "This is the KINGDOM commission, as another expresses it, not the CHRISTIAN commission. The latter is in Luke, distinctively the Gentile Gospel, but not here, which is distinctively the Jewish Gospel . . . It points to the close of the age when the commission will be carried out by the faithful remnant of the Jews so often spoken about. It has not yet been carried out. The story of Acts is not its fulfillment. Its accomplishment has been interrupted, but will be taken up before the Lord comes to deliver Israel at the last." So, these comments by these noted men of God help to throw light on the question as to whether or not this commission is for the Church today.

After His resurrection Jesus was on earth forty days instructing His Apostles concerning the KINGDOM OF GOD. He also told them that "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and every man heard them speak in their own language the wonderful works of God. After this and all during the ministry of the TWELVE (for a successor to Judas had been chosen) the Gospel was preached to Jews only. This continued through the early part of the Acts period. In Acts 10 a vision enabled Peter to realize that the Gospel was for the Gentiles also. So through him the household of Cornelius received the Holy Ghost and were baptized. To this the apostles and brethren in Judea responded by contending with Peter, saying, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised; and didst eat with them." But Peter explained it all and they held their peace, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

In Acts 13 we have the record of Paul's commission to preach the Gospel also. He tells us in Romans 11:13, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles." In Galatians 2:7 he says, "The gospel of the UNCIRCUMCISION was committed unto me, as

the gospel of the CIRCUMCISION was unto Peter.” During the book of Acts period Paul not only preached to both Jews and Gentiles but he suffered greatly at the hands of the Jews. However, it was during this time that he wrote the epistles to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Corinthians and Romans. Only in Corinthians does he refer to water baptism. In I Corinthians 1:14 to 17 he relates having baptized a few persons but frankly says in I Corinthians 1:17 that he was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel. If Christ sent him not to baptize, then was he working under the so-called great commission? In Romans 6:3 to 4 he writes of “so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ.” Is this water baptism? If so then regeneration is by water baptism, since these were baptized INTO JESUS CHRIST. But it says that they were baptized into (or unto) His death. Then it is a DEATH-BAPTISM, a baptism of IDENTIFICATION and not a water baptism in these verses.

Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians are known as Paul’s Prison Epistles. These were written after the book of Acts period and as a result of the full revelation of “the dispensation of the grace of God” which was given him. He tells us that this revelation “in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men.” In none of his Prison Epistles does he mention water baptism. Some one may say, “How about Colossians 2:11 to 12?” Well, let’s look at this passage. In Colossians 2:11 it says, “Ye are circumcised with the circumcision MADE WITHOUT HANDS.” In Colossians 2:12 it says, “Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of THE OPERATION OF GOD.” Both the baptism and the circumcision is made without human hands, and is the operation of God, not of man. Then how can it mean water baptism? Surely it means IDENTIFICATION with Christ in His DEATH-BAPTISM.

Should this not be enough evidence that water baptism is not for the Church today, then we shall turn to Ephesians 4:5 and see what it teaches. Here we read, “One Lord, one faith, ONE BAPTISM.” Not two baptisms, water and Spirit, but ONE baptism. In I Corinthians 12:13 we read, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.” In Ephesians 1:22 and 23 we also read, “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY.” So, it is by the ONE baptism, the baptism of the Spirit, and not by water baptism, that we are made members of the ONE Body, the Church.

Copyist’s Note: The above was preached by Brother Reich several years ago while pastor at Evansville, Indiana, and was his first message on “Pauline truth.”