

One Baptism - In Water

By: Rosco Brong

DISOBEDIENCE TO DIVINE COMMANDS IS NOT A WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

"There is ... one baptism." (Eph. 4:4, 5)

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into (with reference to) Jesus Christ were baptized into (with reference to) his death?" (Rom. 6:3.)

"Our fathers.., were all baptized into(with reference to) Moses in the cloud and in the sea." (I Cor. 10:1, 2.)

Use of scriptural terms in an unscriptural sense is a favorite trick of modernists that has been adopted by some so-called interdenominationalists who pride themselves on their supposed orthodoxy or fundamentalism. So it has become fashionable in certain circles to speak of a "spiritual baptism" of which the Bible tells us exactly nothing.

Satan has never introduced among God's people a heresy so ridiculous but that he has been able to find men willing to prostitute some degree of scholarship in its defense. So it has been with the practice of baby baptism, pouring, and sprinkling as substitutes for believer's baptism. There have been a few scholars of limited ability or honesty, or both, who have tried to justify these unscriptural practices by perverted interpretations of scripture.

A Lost Battle

But among competent scholars the scriptural meaning of "baptize" and "baptism" is no longer a matter of debate. Everyone knows that the ordinary literal meaning of baptize in the New Testament is to dip, plunge, or immerse in water--and whatever figurative meaning the word may occasionally have must be derived from and based upon this literal sense.

Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, whatever their doctrinal errors, were at least, unlike some of their followers, scholarly enough to admit that scriptural baptism was immersion, and that sprinkling in its place was an innovation for the sake of convenience rather than obedience.

Figurative Baptisms

An elementary principle of honest translation and interpretation is that the literal or ordinary meaning of a word is always to be preferred if it makes good sense in the context; figurative or unusual meanings are to be adopted only when demanded by context.

Undoubtedly in Matt. 20:22, Mk. 10:38, and Lu. 12:50 Jesus was speaking of a figurative baptism or immersion in the sufferings of the cross. So the baptism in fire mentioned in Matt. 3:11 and Lu. 3:16 is evidently not a dipping in water. Some interpreters think the reference is to the "fiery trial" of I Pet. 4:12; others refer the language to the lost in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), in which case the baptism is quite literal, except that it is in fire instead of water.

In The Holy Spirit

The Bible also speaks of a baptism in (NOT "with") the Holy Spirit. Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lu. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5, 11:16--these six times and nowhere else do we read that Jesus was to baptize in the Holy Spirit. This baptism in the Holy Spirit took place on the day of Pentecost, symbolizing the dedication and accreditation of the church as an institution, even as baptism in water symbolizes the dedication and accreditation of the individual believer.

Just as an individual believer is scripturally baptized in water only once, so the church as an institution was baptized in the Holy Spirit only once, that is, on the day of Pentecost. The additional manifestation in the house of Cornelius was simply to convince Peter and other Jewish church members that Gentile believers rightfully belonged in the same church.

Not An Individual

Never in all the New Testament is a single individual said to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This was a baptism of the church as such, not of single believers as such. Let us not confuse fillings with the Spirit or gifts of the Spirit with baptism in the Spirit.

If we are members of a scriptural church, in scriptural succession from that first (Baptist) church in Jerusalem, then our church was baptized in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, once for all. If we have not such a church, no fake "Pentecost" will change the fact.

Baptized "Into" Moses

A preposition is a weak peg to hang a doctrine on, but the phrase "baptized into Jesus Christ" in the King James version of Rom. 6:3 has long been a favorite with baptismal regenerationists. They are conveniently or willfully ignorant of the fact that identical translation of the same Greek preposition eis in I Cor. 10:2 makes "our fathers.., all baptized into Moses."

Of course, nobody is ever dipped into Christ, any more than anybody was ever dipped into Moses. The Greek preposition in both these passages should be rendered "with reference to" or "because of," either of which translations will give good sense, while "into" gives nonsense.

Wild Wuestern Whimsy

A reader wants to know what I think of the so-called "expanded translation" by Kenneth S. Wuest of Rom. 6:3 and Eph. 4:5. I quote:

"Do you not know that all we who were placed in Christ Jesus, in his death were placed?" (Rom. 6:3.)

"One Lord, one Faith, one placing into [the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit]." (Eph. 4:5, brackets included.)

I answer: that is not translation, expanded or otherwise: that is mere wild Wuestern whimsy.

The Greek word transliterated baptize does not mean to place or place into in any such free and easy sense. It means to dip, plunge, or immerse in water--unless the context obviously demands another element.

No reputable Greek scholar ever dreamed of such "transla-tion" in former years, but now, driven to desperate expedients to promote the "invisible church" fantasy, modernistic Bible dic-tionaries and commentaries of pseudoscholarship are chirping a chorus of "spiritual baptism"--a thing as invisible and nonexistent in the Bible as the invisible church itself.

"Shut Up To Moses"

Amusingly consistent only in its inconsistency is the same Wuestern "translation" of I Cor. 10:2:

"And all had themselves immersed, surrounded by the cloud [on both sides], thus shut up to Moses [as their leader]." (Brackets are part of quotation.)

"Shut up to Moses," indeed! At least, thank God, we are not shut up to Wuest. If that is translation, a dozen generations of formerly respected English translators missed their calling.

Only One Baptism

According to the Bible (Eph. 4:5), there is only one (literal) baptism, and that is the baptism in water instituted by John the Baptist by divine commission, received by the Lord Jesus, and by Him committed to His church to be observed as an ordinance for disciples (believers) only, as a first act of obedience, to be followed by the observance of all His commandments.

When men speak of a fictitious "spiritual baptism" not mentioned in the Bible, and belittle the one baptism (in water) that is taught in the Bible, we can be sure that their strange doctrine is not the work of the Holy Spirit.

More About Baptism

Reply to Query: The Article, "One Baptism--In Water," published in the Ashland Avenue Baptist, has drawn criticism from a number of readers--some friendly and some hostile. Answering such criticism, Bro. Brong submits the following review with some additional facts from the scriptures.

Let us simply recognize that nouns and verbs, in the very nature of language, are more nearly dependable in meaning than are prepositions. Specifically, we MUST take the Greek preposition eis in different senses in different contexts; we NEED NOT take the noun or verb for baptism or baptize in any other than the literal or nearly literal sense of dip, plunge, immerse, submerge, or overwhelm--and ALWAYS in water unless the context DEMANDS otherwise. This assumption makes possible harmonious interpretation of the scriptural doctrine of baptism without difficulty.

But if we insist on "into" as the unvarying English translation of eis, even though Webster's Third New International Dictionary gives 11 main definitions of "into," we shall have all sorts of trouble. Did the men of Nineveh repent "into" the preaching of Jonah? Did Jesus speak of giving someone a drink "into" the name of a disciple? (Matt. 12:41, 10:42.) Did Peter tell repenters at Pentecost to be baptized "into" remission of sins? (Acts 2:38.)

This last reference involves the use of eis in connection with baptism certainly parallel with Matt. 28:19, Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27, etc. Even more pertinent is I Cor. 10:2, where we read that the Israelites were baptized eis Moses. The construction here is exactly parallel with baptism eis Christ and eis the name of the Lord Jesus. There is no more reason to imagine a "spiritual baptism" "into" Christ than a "spiritual baptism" "into" Moses.

To Avoid Confusion

No doubt there is a real spiritual and scriptural experience FIGURED or SYMBOLIZED in scriptural (water) baptism, but we ought not to confuse the figure with the thing figured. From such confusion the Campbellites teach baptismal regeneration and ultra-dispensationalists teach that "water baptism" was a "temporary rite" no longer to be practiced.

Romans 6:5 seems to me simple enough: "For if we have become planted with (Him) in the LIKENESS of his death, yet also we shall be (in the likeness) of his resurrection." The baptism which figures the burial of Jesus in His death, and His resurrection, also figures our own spiritual death and resurrection as well as the death and resurrection of our bodies. With all this wealth of meaning in Christ's ordinance of baptism, it is no wonder that Satan tries to destroy it!

If we have here only a "spiritual" baptism, a "spiritual" likeness, a "spiritual" death--have we also only a "spiritual" resurrection? Some would say so, but the Bible teaches otherwise. See I Cor. 15:12-19, 29.