



Conducted by
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“By what authority does one person baptise another. How should a person approach the baptising of another. Why was Paul glad that he had baptised no one except Crispus and Gaius (1 Cor. 1:13-15)?

The questioner also asks the authority for a form of words such as “I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, and so that you might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”? This, obviously, is a three-part question and needs to be answered as such.

The first thing we ought to mention to those who may be seeking the truth is that the verb ‘to baptise’ means “to plunge, to dip, to immerse.” Therefore, we are not envisaging an Anglican vicar or a R.C. priest sprinkling water on the forehead of a new-born child, but a baptiser standing in a suitable amount of water in which he can *immerse* a youth or an adult who has confessed faith in Christ. So we want to know by what authority he does this, and for the form of words he may use.

The whole of the doctrine of Christianity is contained in a book we call the Bible, consequently, if the Book as such is authoritative, then we can be reasonably sure that the teaching it contains is also authoritative. If the Managing Director of a firm gives instructions to the workforce and then authenticates such instructions by signature, then all the recipients know that the authority stands behind the instruction which is given. So it is with the Christ of God, Jesus of Nazareth. Standing behind the instructions which Jesus gave is the authority of God Himself. Jesus made that clear to the hearers of His day – **“ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.”** John 8:23. Again in v.26, **“I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him”**(God). He re-emphasises this in v.28, “. . . But as my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things”. In addition, the whole of the O.T. bears witness in prophecy that Jesus, was to be the long-promised Messiah. Archaeologists have proved much of the Biblical record true, and the history of the Christian religion, along with countless millions who have placed their faith in God and His Christ, testifies to the authority which people have seen in the revelation of God contained in the Bible. As if this were not enough, Jesus said to His Apostles, **“But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given to you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but**

the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" Matt. 10:19,20. The authority for the N.T. scriptures, and consequently for the instructions of Jesus, is based on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Apostles.

In Matt.28:18,19 the recorded words of Jesus are, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." the word for power is the Greek word EXOUSIA, and denotes the *authority* of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others. This authority was given to the Apostles, and it is quite clear that they used it (see Acts 2:38,39; read also Acts 3). Since Christ is the Head of the Church and since the Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, the Lord Himself being the chief corner-stone, then the writer sees nothing improper in the authority of Christ being at work in the Church, and consequently any one who baptises in the Church may use the form of words as contained in the question. (See 1 Peter 2:1-10;) Eph. 2:19-22).

THE APPROACH

The questioner asks how the baptiser should approach the act of baptising another. Well, there is no specific scriptural office of 'baptiser' in the Church, but commonsense dictates that certain qualifications are necessary. He must be a mature, experienced male Christian, who has the capacity to deal with any problem which may arise. Therefore, I would be against the indiscriminate use of any male member for this important task; my natural inclination would be to use the same brother who proved that he could handle the task adequately. I would see nothing wrong in training a substitute who could take over if necessary. Preferably, I would think that the leaders of the assembly would have ascertained if the one to be baptised had any acute physical or medical problem which might cause a problem in the water; such information should be passed to the baptiser so that he could act upon it. We must always remember that though there may be zeal on the part of the candidate, other members of the family might not be so accommodating and, indeed, may show scepticism or downright hostility to the whole operation. We might in extremis, be open to legal proceedings if steps have not been taken against such an eventuality.

So how should the baptiser approach baptism. I would suggest with all due care and attention to detail; with dignity, because it is a dignified occasion, or should be; with the sense that he is undertaking an important role in the Church, without considering himself to be more important than any other Christian; always with joy, because although it is a dignified occasion, it is also one of extreme joy in seeing the sacrifice of Christ bear fruit in some life; with thankfulness, because he and the community of Christians have a new brother or sister.

THE CORINTHIAN EXPERIENCE

Paul is not dismissive of the importance of baptism, but he makes the point quite clearly that he was not a baptiser, "For Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the gospel" 1 Cor. 1:17. However, he says that he baptised Crispus and Gaius, and also the household of Stephanus; he didn't know of any others. He gives his reason, "Lest any should say I had baptised in mine own name" vv.14-17. It seems to be quite evident that Paul is trying to quell the 'party' spirit, particularly at Corinth.

Isn't it amazing how some people can, by the force of their personality, impose themselves on others. Take the people mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:12. Paul was a great preacher and teacher; Peter was volatile and dynamic; while Apollos was both eloquent and erudite. It seems also that a 'Christ party' had been formed, probably to off-set the effect of the others. This has been so all down the ages, and I'm quite sure that readers will have seen it in the present day. I have seen some speakers who try to emulate the mannerisms and speech of brothers who have achieved success in platform work. If the 'party spirit' cannot be seen blazoned across the Church, one cannot be

sure that it is dead. Brethren and friends, we should not allow this to happen; the party spirit should not rear its ugly head.

Furthermore, have you ever considered the unique position in which a baptiser in the Church is placed? Can we begin to understand the varied emotions of a candidate for immersion? Nervousness, joy, elation, anticipation. The waiting is over; the decision has been made; the crucial moment has arrived. The old life is ended and a new life is about to begin. He or she feels the strong, supportive arms of the baptiser as the burial in water symbolises the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord, and as sin is swept away by the identification with Him in the beautiful ordinance of baptism. As one emerges from the water, the strong, supportive arms are still there, as if heralding the dawn of a new life in Christ. Is it any wonder that the baptiser is honoured in the minds of some; after all, wasn't he the vehicle of transition from the old to the new? But as Paul knew full well, such an attitude can detract from the efficacy of the One who paid the supreme sacrifice. Yes Paul was glad that **his** name should not be seen above the name which is above every name, the name of his Lord and Master Jesus, the Christ of God. That is why, I believe, he was glad he had not baptised many people. The name of the baptiser can be forgotten, but the name of the One in whom we are baptised must live on in our hearts, and be communicated to as many as we can reach. For His name's sake.

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