

Baptism is a Test of Faith

[The article that follows is the concluding portion of one of a series, 'That they all may be one,' being written for the *Mission Messenger* by W. Carl Ketcherside. In the earlier portion of the article, Bro. Ketcherside has set out, under nine headings, the necessary qualities of the act of faith through which God bestows remission of sins upon those who obey Him. Now he proceeds to show how baptism fulfils all these conditions.]

Identifying the Test

WHAT test does God propose to determine if our faith is of the quality which deserves a bestowal of His great blessings of forgiveness of transgressions, the indwelling of His Spirit, and the hope of eternal life? The simplest and easiest way to answer this is to determine what the inspired apostles required of those who believed, in order that the remission of sins might be freely granted. No better occasion could be afforded for our information than the first proclamation of the glad tidings. This proclamation in fact must take place after the acts which constitute the proclamation. Since those acts involve the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, we must come this side of His resurrection. That brings us to the first Pentecost succeeding that event, and the public proclamation of the apostle Peter.

After insisting upon the conviction or faith of his hearers in the Messiahship of the Nazarene, he heard them ask, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' This was a plain question. It deserved an unmistakeable reply. The reply was given. 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins' (Acts 2:38). Notice that they were to be baptised in the name, that is, by the authority, of Jesus Christ. Here was a real test of faith in that authority.

Remember that there are certain things which cannot be denied. Men may, in order to justify certain creeds and opinions, quibble about meanings and applications of these things, but the facts are unalterable. The people asked what to do. They were told to repent and be baptised. They were told to do this by the authority of Jesus Christ. They were instructed to do it by an ambassador of the absent King. That ambassador was under the direct impulse of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of what may be entailed in baptism as here commanded, and irrespective of its antecedents, consequences, or relationships to the plan of God, sinners were told by divine authority to be baptised, and this extended to Jews, their posterity, Gentiles—that is, all who were subjects of the call of the glad tidings. This is the test of faith as proposed by divine authority. All the scholarship of the world agrees that the word baptism in its original import meant 'immersion, submersion, burial, overwhelming,' and this is substantiated by the universal practice of the primitive Church closest to the time when the command was given. That this was immersion in water is evidenced by Peter himself in Acts 10:47.

But our interest lies in whether baptism in water of a proper subject fulfils the requirements of a test of faith, looking to the reception of blessings of such magnitude as are held forth by the glad tidings. . . .

Examining the Test

1. Immersion in water is a single, simple open act, to which one can submit without being possessed of great philosophic acumen. There is nothing in the word 'immersion' which indicates more than a burial in some element. Not even the idea of coming forth from the element is found in

the word. Of course, since one is to enter a new relationship, and live a new life, the rising from the element is a necessary part of obedience, but this we learn from other terms and examples of its fulfilment. When one is buried with Christ in water, and that because of his faith in the Son of God, he has submitted to the test of heaven.

2. Baptism can be misunderstood only by those who want to do something other than what God has authorised, and by the very act of beclouding the term, show that they lack the first essential—faith. The same rules of interpretation applied to any human document written in the same age, to the same people who were instructed to be baptised will establish beyond any shadow of doubt just what baptism involves.

3. Immersion in water is not a secret, personal, private or internal act to produce purging, but is an open act which may be witnessed by many, and must always be witnessed by at least one other, the one who performs it, thus constituting an initiation ceremony into the community of the saints.

4. The material element employed is universally obtainable. . . . This one item alone goes far towards establishing immersion in water as a test reflecting divine mercy, and when considered in conjunction with the other attributes of such a test will conclusively demonstrate it.

5. The rôle of the one being immersed in water is passive. The one who immerses another acts in the rôle merely of burying one who is dead. One could not more scripturally immerse himself than he could physically bury himself after his decease. All divine communication relative to the action of baptism is given to the one performing the act, and never to the one submitting to it. What other arrangement could the Divine Intelligence have commanded which so aptly fits this requirement?

6. Only humble souls can be recipients of God's blessing. Any test therefore which would admit those worthy, by the same token must bar entrance to those who are not. Rebellion and pride are the twin evils of the human heart. Faith must dethrone the first, and humility the second. Nothing can be so destructive as baptism to either of these. One must submit to authority, simply because it is authority. No reasoning process can figure any relationship between what he is required to do and what he seeks to obtain. Rebellion is crushed in baptism. . . .

7. The immersion of the body or any part thereof in water has been recognised as a means of cleansing, and is universally practised for this purpose. So true is this, that special instruction had to be given, that in the performance of the act as a test of faith, it was not for the 'putting away of the filth of the flesh.'

8. Baptism is a re-enactment by the individual of the facts of the glad tidings, which constitute the power of God unto salvation. 'Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection' (Rom. 6 : 3-5).

9. It is here that baptism proves its worthiness as a real test of faith. Remission of sins takes place in heaven. It is an act of God and not of man. But baptism is performed on earth by man and for man. No-one can see any connection between one man immersing another in water and

the remitting of the sins of that person in heaven. There is but one reason why any accountable being would submit to baptism in water, and that is because of faith in the authority of God.

Baptism and Remission

Is baptism for the remission of sins? There is nothing in water which has any power to remit sins. There is nothing in the act of submerging in water which can remit sins. Forgiveness is an act of the divine mind operating in behalf of man and conditioned upon the faith of man. It is an act of undeserved kindness bestowed upon the basis of belief in a person—the Son of God. Baptism is a test of one's faith in Christ. By submitting to this test, man places himself in a position where the grace of God becomes operative in his behalf. God has not eliminated the will of man in the scheme of redemption. He only tests the willingness of man to bow to His authority. Can a man receive remission of sins if he refuses to be baptised? Certainly not! Noah would not have been saved if he had refused to build the ark; Abel would not have been approved of God if he had not offered a blood sacrifice; the walls of Jericho would not have fallen if Israel had refused to march around them; Naaman would not have been cleansed of leprosy if he had refused to dip in the Jordan. When God proposes a test of faith as a condition to reception of certain blessings, it is an act of unbelief and rebellion to ask Him to grant those blessings while refusing to submit to the test.

When a man believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and is immersed in view of that faith, his sins are remitted and he is adopted into the family of God as an heir. 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.' These are the words of our Lord. But some man adds, 'That is, if he understands that baptism is for the remission of sins.' But God does not say that! That is a human rider attached to the divine revelation. It is an unwritten creed. When there is a believing penitent and the proper action, it is beyond the power of any man to affect the design, whether the subject fully comprehends the design or not. The design of baptism has to do with God's part. When man does what God demands, God will do what He has promised.

Ordinance of Induction

In any ordinance of induction or translation, a proper subject complying with the ordinance, is inducted into that state to which the ordinance is intended to induct, whether he understands the design or not. A slave who is ignorant of the design of the papers intended to secure his freedom, will be just as free when he makes his mark in lieu of a signature, as one who fully understands the whole legal procedure. The sacred scriptures nowhere teach that the design of baptism is contingent for its fulfilment upon a knowledge of that design by the subject of baptism. Such a requirement cannot be a matter of faith. It is arbitrary, dogmatic, and a mere creedal opinion. Men confuse the design of baptism, and the knowledge of that design, until they make remission of sins dependent not upon obedience to the act that God authorises, but upon the degree of human knowledge of the purpose of God.

Every individual upon this earth who believes in his heart that Jesus is the Son of God, and who is immersed in water in conformity to and motivated by that faith, is God's child and my brother. I invite all such to forsake Babylon and to unite with us in an effort to restore the Church of God in its purity. Rejecting all human creeds and opinions as bases of fellowship, let us stand upon His Word.