



Conducted by
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“What are the designs of baptism?”

This question is fundamental to the Christian faith, and is a necessary prerequisite for salvation in its implications. If people *do* think about Christianity at all these days, they generally end their thoughts by saying, “But it doesn’t *really* matter what you believe or do; we are all going to the same place anyway”. This attitude of mind is symptomatic of a dangerous delusion which seems to be afflicting people today. They seem to be willing to commit their eternal destinies to what they *think* the will of God is, rather than endeavouring to find out from God’s Word what *His* will *really* is.

Luke, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, records for us the words of Jesus shortly before He returned to His Father. The burden of His instruction was this: repentance and remission of sins should be preached; it should be in the name of the Christ of God, Jesus; it should be preached first in Jerusalem; and the same message was to be preached to all nations. Consequently, the reader of the New Testament can say with positive conviction that if religious groups exist which have not met the requirements as laid down in the Lord’s instructions, then such groups, to say the very least, cannot be said to be following the ‘way of God’. So we need, then, to examine the New Testament in order to find the true answer, and by so doing we shall see, I believe, the designs of baptism clearly laid out for us.

Waiting on the Lord

Another of the instructions of the Lord to His disciples was that they should tarry in Jerusalem until, as Jesus put it, "they would be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). In the first and second chapters of Acts of Apostles we find them there, where the Lord had indicated, waiting for His promise. Suddenly, there was the sound of a mighty rushing wind which filled all the place where they were sitting, and the Holy Spirit descended on them, in appearance like cloven tongues of fire. This was Pentecost. The Apostles then began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. This was reminiscent of the words of Jesus to His disciples, "take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given 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 stage was now set for the Apostolic announcement concerning salvation. After Peter had reminded the crowd of their heritage, and after *they* had realised the enormity of what they had done in giving Jesus over to be crucified, they cried out to Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren; what shall we do" (Acts 2:37). The inspired answer of Peter was plain and unequivocal, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). So we see the pattern. The message regarding repentance and remission of sins had been preached; it was in the name of Jesus Christ; it was under inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it was preached in Jerusalem. Who would be bold enough, or foolish enough, to say that once having followed the pre-ascension instructions of the Lord to the letter, that the Apostles would then go on to preach *different* versions of the Gospel message in other places. The idea is ludicrous, and unworthy of intelligent consideration.

The Primary Design

It ought to be plain from Peter's inspired announcement on the Day of Pentecost that baptism is 'for the remission of sins'. There can also be little doubt that the *form* of baptism was total immersion in water. This is made clear in other places, e.g., when Paul wrote his letter to the saints in Rome he said, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death" (Rom. 6:4). Similarly, when he wrote to the Colossian saints, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). So the form of baptism was, and still is, total immersion in water, i.e., *buried* with Him in baptism.

The primary *design* of baptism is indicated after the *form* of baptism has been given. Repentance and baptism are related to a further thing - remission of sins. These three things are connected by the Greek preposition *eis* (for) which means 'in order to'. So what is being said by Peter is literally, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *in order to receive* the remission of sins". Remission of sins, then, is the primary design of repentance and baptism. We must understand, of course, that after the Apostles had made the proclamation of the form and the design of baptism on the Day of Pentecost they could not thereafter change the message, nor indeed would God and the Holy Spirit allow them to, so we can safely say that whenever the Gospel was preached in New Testament times, repentance and immersion in water (baptism) were always necessary conditions for the remission of sins. Furthermore, to my knowledge anyway, God has *never changed* that order, so it is still in force today.

The Secondary Designs

When God created man, He created him in His own image; Adam was made in the image of God. But because of the intervention of Satan into the affairs of men, Adam fell. Therefore, there needed to be a second Adam, and that was to be the Son of God. "For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Rom. 5:15); such is the way that Paul explains it. There was need for a new creation.

Paul further states in his letter to Rome, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?" Again, a little later he says, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:3-6). So according to the Holy Spirit through Paul we are baptised *into* Christ, and therefore find ourselves in Christ." As he explains to the saints at Corinth, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Wonder of wonders! Baptism is the initiatory step into the new creation in Christ Jesus. Well might Paul exult, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). The designs of our Heavenly Father surpass our thoughts. We can only stand in amazement, and take advantage of that which He has so wondrously wrought for us.

A further design of baptism, I believe, is to bring us into the full knowledge of what the new life in Christ Jesus really is. Paul writes to the Colossian saints, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).

When we arise out of the watery grave of baptism our eyes are lifted to the divine horizon. There, shimmering in the benign light of the grace and glory of God, through the eye of faith we see the vast, rolling plains of God, bejewelled by the saints who have gone before. Then turning our eyes earthward again, we see the Church to which we have been added, the glorious Body of Christ. In it we see those who have escaped the bondage of sin through being washed in the blood of the Lamb, joyfully striving to obey the upward call of God through the life of the risen Christ; experiencing the comfort and consolation which comes through possession by the Holy Spirit, even though they still have to endure the sometimes abrasive problems of this earthly life. If only we could cultivate the habit of seeking those things which are above, how much more would we relish the cool, refreshing springs of eternal life rather than the brackish, stagnant waters of earth. Yes, God's design in fitting us for participation in the life of the risen Christ is a measure of His love and concern for us.

Perhaps we in the Church have grown so accustomed to the preaching of baptism that we have forgotten the significance of this most beautiful ordinance. We should thank God that *He* hasn't.

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