

IN RESPONSE - THE MODE OF BAPTISM

by Dennis Prutow
Volume II, Number 2

Baptism is a hot topic. Young couples don't think too much about it until children come along. Then there may be a desire on the part of the husband or wife to have their baby baptized. But the baptistic upbringing of one spouse causes reluctance. The debate can then become heated. Emotions can run high. In response to a couple seeking answers, I shall take a look at baptism in three parts. First, I shall look at the mode of baptism. Is the baptist contention correct that the Greek word for baptism always means dip, plunge, or immerse? Answering this question from Scripture will take us a long way down the right path.

Second, I shall discuss the biblical concept of the covenant. A proper understanding of the covenant leads us to see why the sign and seal of the covenant is to be applied to infants in the New Testament era. Third, I shall show that the apostle Paul specifically indicates that baptism replaces circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant.

So, first of all, does the word baptism mean to dip, plunge, or immerse and only to dip, plunge and immerse? What does the Bible have to say? In answering this question, we need show only one place in the Bible where the word baptism means sprinkle. If we can display this, the first part of our argument is won. To do this, we turn to Hebrews 9:11-14.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

A contrast is being drawn between the Old Testament ceremonies and the sacrifice of Christ. And one of the specific Old Testament ceremonies to which the

writer refers in this passage is the right of purification using the ashes of a red heifer. This is significant because the defilement being addressed is that which comes from the contamination of death. We find this ceremony set forth in Numbers.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, `This is the statute of the law which the Lord has commanded, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel that they bring you an unblemished red heifer in which is no defect, and on which a yoke has never been placed. And you shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be brought outside the camp and be slaughtered in his presence. Next Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times. Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight; its hide and its flesh and its blood, with its refuse, shall be burned. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet material, and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer. The priest shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward come into the camp, but the priest shall be unclean until evening. The one who burns it shall also wash his clothes in water and bathe his body in water, and shall be unclean until evening. Now a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place, and the congregation of the sons of Israel shall keep it as water to remove impurity; it is purification from sin" (Numbers 19:1-9).

Strict regulations were to be followed in preparing the ashes of the heifer. But what was to be done with these ashes once they were prepared and properly set aside? Numbers 19 gives several examples. In verse 16-19 we read:

Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. Then for the unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. And a clean person

shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying naturally or the grave. Then the clean person shall sprinkle on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify him from uncleanness, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and shall be clean by evening.

The procedure is clear. A person who touches a dead body is unclean. Purification is accomplished by taking some of the ashes from the red heifer, putting those ashes in water, taking a hyssop branch, dipping it in the water mixed with ashes, and sprinkling it on the unclean person.

What must be noted is that this ceremony clearly requires the sprinkling of water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer. The Hebrew word properly translated sprinkling is used 16 times in the Old Testament. It refers to the sprinkling of oil (Exodus 29:21, Leviticus 14:16, 27), the sprinkling of blood (Exodus 29:21, Leviticus 5:9, 4:6 & 17, 16:14, 15, & 19, Numbers 19:4), and the sprinkling of water (Numbers 19:18, Leviticus 14:51). There is no doubt concerning the meaning of this word.

It is also of interest that the word translated 'dip' in Numbers 19:18, as found in the Greek version of the Old Testament, is a form of the word baptism. The hyssop is to be plunged into the container of water mixed with the ashes. The residue left on the branch when withdrawn from the water is to be sprinkled on the unclean person for purification.

Returning to Hebrews, we once again find this description,

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:11-14)

To be sure, those Old Testament sprinklings were inadequate to cleanse the

conscience. But what were those Old Testament sprinklings?

The writer to the Hebrews answers for us. He explains what the Holy Spirit is saying concerning those ancient ceremonies.

The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and *various washings*, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation (Hebrews 9:8-10, italics added).

Notice that the writer to the Hebrews calls those ancient rituals of sprinkling 'various washings.' They were designed to wash the flesh as a sign of purification.

But the 'various washings' of Hebrews 9:10 are literally 'various baptisms.' The literal Greek word used here is 'baptisms.' The various washings are literally various baptisms. The Bible says that the Old Testament rituals which clearly involve the sprinkling of blood, or oil, or water -- the Bible says these acts of sprinkling are baptisms.

This means that the word 'baptism' does not mean only dip, plunge, or immerse. The Bible uses the word baptism to refer to sprinkling.

This is important to grasp. Those of baptistic persuasion insist that real baptism means immersion. A sprinkling is not a legitimate baptism. But the Bible actually leads us in a different direction. According to Hebrews 9, sprinkling is considered baptism. And so when an infant is sprinkled, it is legitimate to call that sprinkling a baptism.

When I baptize an infant I immerse my hand, I plunge my hand, in the water and cradle as much water as I can in my hand. When one father who was holding his son for baptism saw me do this, his eyes became wide and he began to draw back. He saw a bath coming. Well, the father did not get a bath. But I did use as much water as I could in that baptism.

Understanding that sprinkling is a legitimate mode of baptism is important. For once this is understood, the stranglehold immersion has on our thinking is broken. It then becomes much more possible to entertain the actual baptism of infants. Next time we'll look at the implications of Covenant of Grace on baptism.

'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303.

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IN RESPONSE - A REBUTTAL TO KATHY STEGALL, PART I

by Dennis Prutow

Volume II, Number 2-2

My recent articles on Biblical Submission brought about a dialogue through *Cornerstones*, a periodical “dedicated to a discussion of women’s issues from a biblical perspective.” I’m grateful to be able to enter into this dialogue.

In writing about the role of each member of the Trinity, and in reply to my first article, Kathy Stegall says, “The Bible does not teach, however, that these different tasks are carried out by means of an authority structure.” To prove her point, Mrs. Stegall attempts to show the submission of the Father to the Son. “**The Father submits**, ‘Therefore God exalted him [Christ] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...’ (Philippians 2:9)” (*Cornerstones*, Fall 1992). We are supposed to infer from this text that the Father establishes the Son in a supreme position and thus places Himself under the Son by “yielding (submitting) his honor to that of the Son” (*Ibid.*).

Does Philippians 2:9 prove the submission of the Father to the Son? Absolutely not! Mrs. Stegall will not make the important distinction between the Ontological Trinity and the Economic Trinity. She seems unable to view the Trinity from these two different perspectives as the Bible does.

On one side, we must see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as equal in essence and being. How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory (WSC Q&A 6). This is the view of the Trinity from the standpoint of essence or being, the Ontological Trinity.

On the other hand, the Bible is equally clear that each Person of the Godhead plays a unique role. This is the view of the Trinity from the perspective of the administration of salvation, the Economic Trinity. Commenting on Ephesians 1:3-14 Mrs. Stegall denies there is any *clear* delineation regarding the roles of the persons of the Trinity. “Rather,” she says, “this passage speaks of the oneness of the Trinity, each person carrying out certain functions, but at the same time, so united, so intermingled in

plan and work, that we cannot say that one function belongs to one person to the exclusion of the other two” (*Ibid.*).

Such a position strikes at the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It undermines the Covenant of Redemption spelled out in Scripture. Knowingly or unknowingly, Mrs. Stegall is standing juxtaposed to the historic Reformed teaching of the Christian church concerning the Trinity.

Philippians 2:9 clearly has to do with the work of Christ as the Mediator. This work is rooted in what we understand to be the Covenant of Redemption. In this covenant the Father makes a promise to the Son on the condition of perfect obedience, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession” (Psalm 2:8). We know that the terms of this promise involve perfect obedience for two reasons.

First, the requirement for heaven is perfect obedience (Leviticus 18:5). No fallen human being can achieve this standard. Second, Christ enters the world in order to claim His inheritance as the Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). He comes as a representative man to fulfill the obedience required of the Father. That He is a representative man is clear from Romans 5:19, “For as through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

Christ comes into the world as a representative man specifically to accomplish the obedience required of the Father. This is the other side of the Covenant of Redemption. “Then I said, ‘Behold I come; in scroll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do Thy will, Oh my God’” (Psalm 40:8). These are the words of Jesus Christ. This is confirmed for us in Hebrews 10:4-10.

Now we ask: Is the Father requiring obedience of the Son? Does the Son obey the Father’s will? Is there an authority structure here? As concerns the work of our salvation, the emphatic answer is *yes*.

With regard to Christ being the Mediator, there is an authority structure. First, there is clear distinction between the work of the Father and the work of

the Son. For example, the Father *sent* the Son. In the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly identifies Himself as *sent* from the Father. Here are but two examples: “I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true” (John 7:28); “I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me” (John 8:42). Notice that Christ goes so far as to say, “I have not even come on My own initiative.” For Jesus Christ there was a division of labor within the Godhead. The Father sent Him. It was not the other way around.

And it was the Second Person of the Trinity who took on human form, entering the world through the womb of the virgin Mary. It was not the Father. It was God the Son who died on the Cross in obedience to God the Father. It was not the other way around. There is no confusion or intermingling of roles here. To suggest that such is the case is to wrest the Scriptures to our own destruction.

Was this work done within the context of an authority structure? When Christ walked the dusty trails of Galilee, He presented Himself as a man under authority. And others viewed Him in this way. Consider Matthew 8:5-10,

And when He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him, and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain.’ And He said to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’ But the centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, “Go!” and he goes, and to another, “Come!” and he comes, and to my slave, “Do this!” and he does it.’ Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled, and said to those who were following, ‘Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.’

In His role as Mediator, Christ is under the authority of the Father. He *has* authority because He is *under* authority.

It is in the same context, the context of the Covenant of Redemption, that we should view Philippians 2:9. In other words, Philippians 2 relates to the Economic Trinity. Upon fulfilling the conditions of the Covenant of Redemption, Christ receives the promise of the Father.

Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I consulted the following commentators on this text: Alford, Beare, Calvin, Eadie, Kennedy (EGT), Hendricksen (NTC), R. Martin (TBC), R. Martin (TNTC), Meyer, Lightfoot, Matthew Henry, Riddle (Langes), Robertson, and Vincent (ICC). None of these commentators even hint that this text says the Father is “yielding (submitting) his honor to that of the Son” as affirmed by Mrs. Stegall.

Why? The context of the exaltation is that of the Covenant of Redemption. It has to do with the Economic Trinity. “The elevation is, then, not in regard to His nature or inherent place within the Godhead. It is rather an ascription to Him of what could only be His after the submission and sacrifice of His earthly life” (Martin, TNTC). Christ is therefore not exalted above God the Father. Christ, now in His human nature, is raised to a position of *equality with the Father*. He sits at the Father’s right hand (Ephesians 1:20).

In addition, it is not God the Father who defers to Christ. The phrase, “of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,” refers to “[t]he whole body of created intelligent beings in all departments of the universe” (Vincent). The Commentators are united on this point because it was Christ’s obedience which brought to Him universal authority over all of *creation*.

Finally, this was done, not to bring glory to Himself. There is no deferment of the Father to the honor of the Son. Rather, Christ obeyed the Father and was subsequently exalted, as Paul says, “to the glory of God the Father.” “It is God Himself who exalts Christ, and the acclamations which acknowledge his enthronement redound **to the glory of the Father**” (Beare).

Mrs. Stegall is in error. She is perverting the doctrine of the Trinity to meet her aversion to the biblical concept of authority. She attempts to show there is no authority structure within the Trinity. She errs. She embraces this error in order to elude the divinely ordained authority structure within the family and the church. As a result, Mrs. Stegall errs greatly on both counts.

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