

As for the mode of baptism, I am certain that sprinkling is the Biblical mode. While the Greek *bapto* means 'to dip', *baptizo* - the usual New Testament word - is a multi-modal concept signifying 'to wash' whatever mode is used. Through contact with water, irrespective of the quantity, it illustrates the believer's union with Christ. On careful examination of every instance, it simply cannot be proved that immersion or dipping was ever used in the New Testament. References to Old Testament ceremonial washings (see Heb. 9:10) use *baptismos* to describe them. It is certain that these washings were by sprinkling (see Numb. 8:7; 19:13-21). Clearly, sprinkling was to be used in the New Testament Church according to the prophecies of Isaiah (52:15) and Ezekiel (36:25). With great respect to our Baptist friends, what has union with Christ in his death and burial (Rom. 6:3-6) got to do with immersion in water? Our Lord was buried *horizontally* in a tomb not six feet down in the ground, and certainly not in water. This passage simply does not teach baptism by immersion. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch *both* 'went down into the water' (Acts 8:38). Arguably, they walked together down to the water's edge, where, both standing in the water, one was sprinkled by the other. It is not necessary to the text that the eunuch was immersed.

Noting Paul's reference to Israel's 'baptism into Moses' in 1 Cor. 10:2, the most that can be said is that the Israelites were sprinkled with sea spray. It was the Egyptians who were immersed! Noting also Peter's comparison of baptism with the flood (see 1 Pet. 3:20-1), it was the ungodly who were drowned! For confirmation of these and other details, I refer the reader to Rodger M. Crooks' excellent popular study *Salvation's Sign and Seal* (Christian Focus, 1997, ISBN 185792 316 2).

Notwithstanding the sincerity of their convictions, I would urge our Baptist friends to reconsider and embrace the Reformed view as truly Biblical.

Dr Alan C. Clifford
(Pastor, NRC)

NRC/b

Enquiries to: 7 Woodside Park,
Attleborough, Norfolk NR17 2JL
Tel: 01953 453803/01603 452387

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South Park Avenue

BIBLICAL BAPTISM

As a former Baptist pastor, I wish to explain why I no longer adhere to my previous views. In doing so, I have no wish to question the sincerity of those whom I still lovingly regard as brothers and sisters in Christ. I am simply motivated by the demands of truth. Therefore, in a spirit of honest enquiry, I should make it clear that the issue is not about believer's baptism *versus* infant baptism. Reformed believers who practise infant baptism *also* practise believer's baptism. Adult believers converted from a non-Christian background should be baptized upon their profession of faith. The missionary context of the *Acts of the Apostles* demands no other conclusion. The only question concerns their children: should they also be baptized?

Critics of infant baptism often argue that it produces only nominal Christians at best. However, I can cite cases of apostasy and immorality among strong-minded advocates of believer's baptism by immersion. If our Baptist brethren argue that such lapses do not call their principles into

question, the same may be said by those of the contrary view. My Baptist friends would agree that ultimately, the issues must be settled by Biblical exegesis. By this criterion, I have never doubted the rightness of rejecting my former principles.

The Reformed theology of baptism is rooted in Holy Scripture. Of course, Baptists disagree. But to reject infant baptism in the absence of *explicit* textual evidence would also bar women from the Lord's Supper. However, both practices are inferred from *other* evidence and arguments. Indeed, Covenant theology recognises the continuity of the Covenant of Grace throughout all ages. Since children were included in God's covenant promises within Old Testament Israel (Gen. 17:7), the fact that there is no revocation of this provision in the New Testament challenges the Baptist view. Instead, covenant language is too clear to miss (see Acts 2:39; Rom. 11:15-22; Eph. 2:11-13). It is more than likely that the baptized households of the New Testament included infants (see Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 1:16). To deny this is highly questionable (see Acts 21:5). Clearly, the covenant sign was changed from circumcision to baptism (Col. 2:11-12). On the assumption that

the two signs refer to the same realities of faith, pardon and spiritual renewal (see Rom. 2:28-9; 4:11; 6:4; Gal. 3:26-7), believers *and* their children continue to be included in the provisions of the Covenant of Grace. Therefore both may be baptized.

Clearly, 'covenant theology' has a sound Biblical basis. Furthermore, since Jewish circumcision has been superseded by Christian baptism as the sign of covenant initiation (compare Exod. 12:48 and Matt. 28:19), the enlargement of continuing covenant privilege provides several benefits, including - in line with Gal. 3:26-8 - the baptism of 'baby girls'. In short there are neither ethnic nor gender obstacles where baptism is concerned. Another benefit is that the 'blood-shedding' ordinances of circumcision and the passover are replaced by the two 'bloodless' sacraments of the New Testament. This is the teaching of established Biblical tradition.

The Reformed view does not eliminate the necessity of personal repentance and faith. Of course God has no grandchildren. Of course baptized children are not saved by their parents' faith. However, they are saved by their parents' God. By virtue of the

promises made to parents *and* their children (Acts 2:39), the latter are to grow up to experience the reality of God's grace, i.e. to know personally the 'new birth' as surely as *physically* circumcised Israelites were only regarded by God as true Israelites through *spiritual* or 'heart circumcision' (see Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Rom. 2:28-9). The argument that one *cannot* preach to, and consequently *ought not* to baptise, babies applies equally to circumcision as to baptism. The fact remains that God commanded Abraham the adult believer to give the sign of justifying faith (Rom. 4:11) to baby Isaac! Is this not also a challenge to Baptist principles?

This teaching should not be applied indiscriminately. Only the children of believing parents (or at least *one* believing parent) should be baptized. Furthermore, Roman Catholic baptismal teaching is false and superstitious: the act of baptism does not convey the Holy Spirit. In this respect, even the baptismal regeneration language of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) is at best ambiguous, despite attempts to rescue it from Anglo-catholic interpretation. But these problems do not threaten the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism which is rooted in the Word of God.