

# Church Membership 6

We come now to the subject of Baptism. This is a divisive subject – our church has stated in Article of Faith 6 (a): *The Free Presbyterian Church, under Christ the great King and Head of the Church, realises that bitter controversy raging around the ordinance of Christian Baptism has divided the Body of Christ when that Body should have been united in Christian love and Holy Ghost power to stem the onslaughts and hell-inspired assaults of modernism, hereby affirms that each member of the Free Presbyterian Church shall have liberty to decide for himself which course to adopt, each member giving due honour in love to the views held by differing brethren.* We reject the thought of *Baptismal Regeneration* (i.e. that baptism makes someone a Christian), and we also reject the thought that baptism is necessary to salvation – while believing that every child of God should be baptised.

In favour of what is called *Believers' Baptism* we have great names like William Carey, John Bunyan, John Gill and C H Spurgeon. On the *Paedo-Baptist* side (that believes baptism may rightfully be administered to the children of believers) are men such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, George Whitefield and Robert Murray McCheyne.

I have attached an extract from a highly popular *Systematic Theology* written by Wayne Grudem, a Baptist writer.

Tonight we will look at the subject strictly from the Baptist point of view.

## 1 The Meaning of Baptism

In Colossians 2:12 we read of being buried with Christ in baptism.

- Baptism represents identification with Christ in His sufferings, burial and resurrection.
- It indicates the forgiveness and cleansing of the believer's sins.
- It shows we have risen with Christ in a new life.
- It is evidence of love for Christ – 'If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14: 15).
- It is a testimony to converted and unconverted – by being baptised the Ethiopian eunuch testified before all in his group, and 3,000 Jews testified before thousands of their own nation by being baptised on the Day of Pentecost.

## 2 The Subjects of Baptism

Only those who have exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repented of their sins should be baptised – see the following Scriptures:

- Matthew 28: 19.
- Mark 16: 15, 16.
- Acts 2: 37, 38, 41.
- Acts 8: 26-39 (esp. verse 37).
- Acts 10: 44-48.
- Acts 16: 31-34.

We have also the example of Christ who was baptised at the age of 30.

Spurgeon tells the story of the Vicar of Isleham who poured scorn on the baptism of a man who was somewhat 'slow'. The vicar said: 'A man who never went to school and cannot read a word! How much can he know about the religion he came here to profess?' The reply he got was: 'Well, very likely the poor man knows little as yet; still he told us he found the Saviour, and became happy in His love. But do you not, Sir, christen little children, declaring that you make them children of God, while you are perfectly aware that the children know nothing at all.'

### 3 The Manner of Baptism

Baptists believe this should be by total immersion.

- The primary meaning of the Greek word to baptise means 'to plunge the person totally into water'. Baptists believe the Greek word should have been translated 'immerse' rather than 'baptise' which is a transliteration rather than a translation of the Greek.
- Some of the figures used suggest total immersion e.g. 'buried with him by baptism into death' (Romans 6: 4).
- John Gill in his Commentary quotes Selden as saying: 'In England of late years, I ever thought the parson baptised his own fingers rather than the child.' The parson dipped the one and sprinkled the other.
- Places mentioned in the Bible in connection with baptism suggest total immersion – John 3: 23, Matthew 3: 13-17, Acts 8: 38, 39. John Calvin says of John 3: 23 'that baptism was performed by John and Christ by plunging the whole body under water.'

### 4 The Name in which Baptism is to be Administered

Matthew 28: 19 makes it clear that baptism is to be administered in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This indicates total allegiance to all the Persons in the Trinity.

### 5 The Blessing of Baptism

- Psalm 19: 11 tells us that in keeping God's commandments there is great reward.
- Spurgeon said he 'lost a thousand fears in the River Lark' (where he was baptised).

Baptism is an ordinance appointed by God and ought to be taken seriously by every believer. If entered into in a spiritual frame of mind it is a source of great blessing.