

**THERE
IS
ONE**

Baptism

G. V. Growcott

There Is One Baptism

"The unity of the Spirit...one Body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, ONE BAPTISM, one God and Father of all."

Ephesians 4:3-6

I. The Importance of Earnest and Reverent Obedience

(1 Sam. 15:22; Jer. 7:23; Luke 6:46; John 14:21; 1 John 2:4; Ecc. 12:13)

II. What Baptism Symbolizes and Accomplishes

1. A cleansing, a washing away—remission—forgiveness of sins.
(Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26)
2. A burial and rebirth—a death to the old Adam—a resurrection to newness of life.
(Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; John 3:3, 5)
3. A Union with Christ, a partaking of his righteousness and the effects of his sacrifice; a naturalization into the citizenship of the commonwealth of Israel and an heirship of the promises made to the Fathers.
(Gal. 3:26-29; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13)
4. A release from the bondage and slavery of Sin; a transfer of masters from the service of Sin unto death to the service of Righteousness unto life.
(Rom. 6:3, 4, 7, 11, 17, 18; Rom. 7:6; 5:18 with 8:1, 2)

III. Total Immersion in Water Necessary

1. To fulfil the symbol of burial and resurrection or rebirth.
(see passages under II:2)
2. As demonstrated by the descriptions and instances of baptism recorded in Scripture.
(Acts 8:39, 40; Matt. 3:6, 16; John 3:23)
3. The actual meaning of the Greek word (*baptizo*) used in the New Testament.
 - a. Usage of general Greek literature over a two thousand year period.
 - b. Septuagint translation of 2 Kings 5:14 (*baptizo*).
 - c. In writings of so-called "Church Fathers."
 - d. Words used for baptism by early writers in Latin.
 - e. Words used in early translations of Scriptures in Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, etc.

IV. Knowledge and Belief of the Gospel an Essential Prerequisite

1. General references to the necessity of belief.
(Heb. 11:6; Rom. 1:16, 17; Hab. 2:4; 2 Thess. 2:12, 13)
2. Baptism specifically and inseparably associated with belief.
(Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21; Mark 16:16; Acts 18:8; Acts 16:30; Acts 8:36, 37; Acts 8:12)

V. Baptism Obligatory—Not Optional

1. Because of its significance and the emphasis that the Scriptures lay upon what it accomplishes, making salvation contingent upon its observance.
(Rom. 6:5; Gal. 3:27-29; 1 Pet. 3:21; Tit. 3:5; John 3:5, 7; Mark 16:16)
2. It is expressly commanded.
(Acts 10:48; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:37, 38; Matt. 28:19)
3. Its necessity proven by invariable example of the New Testament.
(See the many passages already adduced)
4. The "One Baptism" an element of the seven-fold "Unity of the Spirit."
(Eph. 4:3-6)

* * *

I. The Importance of Earnest and Reverent Obedience

It is a fundamental scriptural principle that God regards obedience to His commands and ordinances as more important than any other manifestation of love or respect for Him. He says through the prophet Samuel, in rebuke of Saul who sought to please the Lord other than how He had commanded—

"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to *obey* is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

And through Jeremiah regarding Israel God said (7:23)—

"But this thing I commanded them, saying, *Obey My voice*, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and *walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you*, that it be well unto you."

And in the words of Jesus,

"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"
(Luke 6:46).

"If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

John declares (1 John 2:4)—

“He that saith, I know Him and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.”

And finally Solomon—

“*Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*” (Eccl. 12:13).

Obviously then our course is clear. We must humbly learn what God desires and requires, and we must earnestly try to obey. The first point, then, has been scripturally substantiated. It is difficult to conceive how anyone who professes to be a Christian would feel secure in ignoring any of God’s commands, particularly one so clear and unmistakable and so fraught with significance as we shall see baptism to be.

Yet the whole “Christian” world, almost without exception regards Scriptural baptism with amused contempt, and has substituted for it the unscriptural and meaningless man made ritual of sprinkling unconscious babes. How can they hope to please God with such a flagrant disregard for the sanctity of His ordinances?

* * *

II. What Baptism Symbolizes and Accomplishes.

1. *A cleansing, a washing away—remission—forgiveness of sins.*

Ananias, when he was sent to Paul in Damascus, said to him—

“Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

Peter said to the multitude in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38)—

“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.”

Paul, writing to the Corinthians and reminding them of their position in Christ, said (1 Cor. 6:11)—

“Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus.”

And to the Ephesians he refers directly to the medium of this cleansing when he says—

“Sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water, by the Word” (Eph. 5:26).

2. *A burial and rebirth—a death to the old Adam—a resurrection to newness of life.*

Paul illustrates this aspect most clearly in writing to the Romans, where he explains that their baptism was a death to the service of the flesh which can only reward with corruption, and a rebirth to an entirely new way of life with limitless prospects.

He says (Rom. 6:3, 4), as he urges them to put away sins and to live in consistency with the symbolism of the ordinance they had undergone—

“Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized 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.”

And he continues throughout the whole chapter in the same strain, emphasizing the vast change in the purpose and principles of life that must necessarily accompany a sincere baptism.

“We have been planted together in the likeness of his death,”—he says (v. 5), in further reference to this aspect of the symbolism of baptism.

And to the Colossians—

“Ye are buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him” (2:12).

John records that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, was greatly moved by the teachings of Jesus, to the extent that he came secretly to him at night, that he might learn more about him. And Jesus, in the conversation that ensued, explained to this enquiring Pharisee the necessity of rebirth before a man could be an acceptable subject for God’s Kingdom:

“Ye must be born again . . . Ye must be *born of water and of Spirit*” (John 3:3, 5).

3. *A union with Christ, a partaking of his righteousness and the effects of his sacrifice, a naturalization into the citizenship of the commonwealth of Israel and an heirship of the promises made to the Fathers.*

It is in writing to the Galatians that Paul brings this out most forcibly. He is there reasoning upon the vast superiority of the new Covenant in Christ over the old one through Moses, to which the Galatians seemed to be drifting back. He is explaining that the *Mosaic* law was but an interim arrangement until Christ should come to bring into force the original *Abrahamic* covenant and promises, which, says Paul, were on the basis of faith, and not fleshly descent or the works of the Law. “For,” he says—

“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither bond nor free . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

“And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promises” (Gal. 3:26-29).

And to the Corinthians, he speaks along the same line concerning our unity with Christ by baptism—

“For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

“For by one Spirit are we all *baptized into one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” (1 Cor. 12:12, 13).

4. *A release from the bondage and slavery of Sin; a transfer of masters from the service of Sin unto death to the service of Righteousness unto life.*

These different phases of the symbolism and purpose of baptism are all, of course, inter-related. They are all parts of a whole, rather than independent features. So, continuing his argument that by baptism we are buried with Christ into death (Rom. 6:3, 4), to which reference has been made already, Paul says (v. 7)—

“He that is dead is freed from sin.”

“Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed to sin” (verse 11).

“Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to you” (v. 17).

—still obviously referring to baptism, for he continues (v. 18):

“Being then made free from sin (by a typical death), ye became the servants of righteousness.”

And further (ch. 7, v. 6)—

“Now are we delivered from the law, having died (in baptism) to that wherein we were held.”

In chapter 5 he has explained how condemnation came upon the human race by the transgression of Adam, from whom all spring. (v. 18)—

“By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation.”

This he calls (in chap. 8) “the law of sin and death” saying (8:1, 2)—

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Here again the importance of baptism is evident for as we have seen it is by this act that we become “in Christ” and so gain this release.

* * *

III. Complete Immersion Under Water Necessary

1. *To fulfill the symbol of burial and resurrection or rebirth.*

This is shown in the passages already referred to, and is the basis of all the meaning and fitness of baptism. To destroy this figure is to rob the ordinance of all appropriateness and significance.

2. *As demonstrated by the descriptions and instances of baptism recorded in Scripture.*

In the eighth chapter of Acts, we are told how the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia was reading the Scriptures in his chariot as he was

returning from worshipping at Jerusalem. Philip was directed by God to approach him, and explain the Scriptures to him.

Having taught him the things concerning Jesus Christ out of all the prophecies, the Ethiopian requested to be baptized. Then in verse 38 of this 8th chapter of Acts we are told—

“They went down—they went down—both into the water.”

And in the 39th verse—

“And when they were *come up out of* the water...”

In the account of John the Baptist’s preaching and baptizing, we read (Matt. 3:6)—

“They were baptized in Jordan.”

In the same chapter, describing Jesus’ baptism by John (v. 16)—

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.”

And we find recorded elsewhere concerning John the Baptist that (John 3:23)—

“He was baptizing in Aenon, near Salem, because there *was much water there.*”

All these incidents show that a Scriptural baptism required “much water” and was a complete immersion, or burial, in water.

3. *The actual meaning of the Greek word used in the New Testament.*

There is no question that the original word in the Greek means to immerse or submerge, and *nothing else*. No Greek scholar would or could deny it.

- a. The word is so used by all classes of writers in Greek over a period of two thousand years stretching centuries both before and after Christ. On no occasion do Greek writers use the word to mean “sprinkling” for which they had an entirely different word.
- b. The translators of the Septuagint version used the Greek word “*baptizo*” to translate the Hebrew word rendered “dip” in the Authorized Version at II Kings 5:14, “And Naaman went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan.”
- c. Quotations have been compiled and could be given from Basil the Great, Chrysostom, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Hippolytus, Theophylact, Hilary, Jerome, Justin Martyr, and others, to illustrate that they understood baptism as a complete immersion. Although these so-called Fathers of the Church are no real authority, their writings do prove that in *their* day (the first few centuries of the Christian era) the orthodox church still possessed the true scriptural understanding on this question at least.
- d. The early writers who wrote in Latin, as Tertullian, translate the Greek “*baptizo*” into Latin words meaning immerse or submerge.

The earliest Latin versions and early versions in Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Gothic, etc., translate the Greek "*baptizo*" into the word in their own language meaning immerse or submerge.

In short, no one in possession of the facts does, or would, venture to question the original meaning of the term, and if, in our Bibles, it had been properly *translated* instead of just carried over from the Greek, much error and confusion could have been avoided, and false doctrine on the matter would have been exposed.

* * *

IV. Knowledge and Belief of the Gospel an Essential Prerequisite.

This easily proved and unassailable fact strikes the death blow to the false doctrine of infant-baptism. Baptism to be scriptural and effective, **must be preceded by belief.** Belief cannot be dispensed with.

1. *General references to the necessity of belief.*

Paul says (Heb. 11:6), "Without faith (belief) it is **impossible** to please God," and further, "He that cometh to God *must believe.*"

And to the Romans (1:16)—

"The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that **believeth.**"

And in support of the necessity of belief he goes on to quote from Habakkuk (2:4)—

"The just shall live by faith (or belief)."

Writing to the Thessalonians, he refers to "*salvation through . . . belief of the Truth*" (2 Thess. 2:13).

2. *Baptism specifically and inseparably associated with belief.*

But we are not left with these general expressions. We find the necessity of belief inseparably linked with the ordinance of baptism in several places, and we are not given the slightest justification or loophole for separating them, or considering one as effective without the other. Again quoting Paul, this time to the Colossians (2:12)—

"Ye are buried with him (Christ) in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him through **faith (belief)** of the operation of God."

Peter says (1 Pet. 3:21)—

"Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God."

—necessarily implying knowledge and belief.

Christ, when he parted from his disciples, commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and he added (Mark 16:16)—

"He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved; but he that *believeth not* shall be damned."

In Acts 18 we are told of Paul's preaching at Corinth in Greece, and the circumstances that occurred in connection with it. Then (v. 8)—

"And many of the Corinthians, hearing, *believed*, and were baptized."

They heard; they believed; they were baptized—and that is the order we find invariably followed in Scripture. *There is never a hint of baptism without previous belief.*

Some time earlier, north of Corinth, in Philippi, Paul was thrown into prison for his preaching. An angel released him and, being impressed by the miracle, the jailor asked Paul (Acts 16:30)—

"What must I do to be saved?"

Paul answered—

"Believe . . . and thou shalt be saved."

And the record continues—

"He was baptized, he and all his . . . *believing in God*, with all his house."

In Acts 8 we have the record of Philip preaching in Samaria. In verse 12 we read—

"But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized."

Here we are told what it was necessary to believe in apostolic times—the "*things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ.*" These things, sad to say, are like the divine ordinance of baptism, neglected and rejected by the churches of today.

Baptism, as we have seen, must be the "answer of a good conscience" (1 Pet. 3:21), and it operates "through faith" (Col. 2:12). Infant baptism is unknown to Scripture and is utterly incompatible with all that the Scriptures teach concerning baptism.

* * *

V. Baptism Not Optional But Indispensable

Perhaps it may be felt that this has been well established by what has already been said, but under this heading we would like to summarize the passages and considerations which demonstrate this point.

1. *Because of its significance and the emphasis that the Scriptures lay upon what it accomplishes, making salvation contingent upon its observance.*

Paul, writing to the Romans, and speaking specifically of being "buried with him in baptism" says (6:5)—

"If we have been planted together . . . we shall be in the likeness of his resurrection."

The *one* depends on the *other*.

To the Galatians he makes the same qualification (Gal. 3:27-29). If they are baptized, they have put on Christ, and if they are Christ's they are heirs of the promises.

And Peter said (1 Pet. 3:21)—

“Baptism doth now save us.”

Can its necessity be questioned?

Paul speaks in a similar vein to Titus (3:5)—

“He saved us through the *washing of regeneration* (rebirth, see John 3:5) and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

And those words of Christ to Nicodemus emphasize the essentiality of baptism to salvation (John 3:5-7)—

“Except a man be **born of water**, and of the Spirit, he *cannot enter* the Kingdom of God . . . Ye **must** be born again.”

His final instructions, when examined on this point, are further proof (Mark 16:16)—

“He that believeth **and is baptized** shall be saved.”

2. *It is expressly commanded.*

Consider the instances of direct command upon the subject. When Peter had expounded the Scriptures to Cornelius and those of his household, we are told (Acts 10:48)—

“And he **commanded them** to be baptized in the Name of the Lord.”

Likewise Ananias' command to Paul (Acts 22:16)—

“Arise, and be baptized.”

When Peter preached to the Jews after the resurrection of Jesus, those who were convinced asked (Acts 2:37)—

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

And Peter gave them the same instruction (v. 38)—

“Repent, and *be baptized.*”

Jesus said (Matt. 28:19)—

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, *baptizing them.*”

Then he adds—and it is to this that we particularly desire to draw attention in this connection—

“Teaching them to observe **all things** whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Is baptism one of the “all things” that Jesus commanded? We do not believe there can be any doubt, for he had just commanded it in the *previous* verse.

3. *Its necessity is proven by the invariable example of the New Testament.*

We find it accepted without question, and obeyed without exception. It is an integral part of the preaching and activities of the apostles and believers all through the inspired record. This will surely have been evident from what has already been adduced.

4. *The “One Baptism” is an integral element of the sevenfold “Unity of the Spirit.”*

Ephesians 4 is an exhortation by the apostle Paul to live according to godliness. It is not an exhortation just to "be good" according to the world's vague and hazy conceptions of goodness, with no better guide than its own uncertain conscience and natural fleshly reasoning.

No, Paul's words rest upon a firm foundation of specifically revealed **divine truth** and specifically enjoined **divine commandments**.

Natural man does not like this. He wants to be free to speculate and formulate his own conceptions of goodness, but if he recognizes the Scriptures as the Word of God, then wisdom demands that he accept their presentation of eternal facts, and not his own ideas. Paul says (Eph. 4:14)—

"That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine... but speaking the **truth** in love."

The contrast is between Truth and natural speculations. And in verse 21—

"If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the *Truth is in Jesus*."

In verses 3 to 6 he gives an outline of what comprises the "Truth as it is in Jesus"—

"The unity of the Spirit... one Body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, **one Baptism**, one God and Father of all."

Here again is illustrated the solemn importance of baptism—the **one Baptism**. What does he mean by **one baptism**? We can answer this by asking what he means by one Lord and one God. He says elsewhere—

"There be gods many and lords many, but *to us* there is but one God and one Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 8:5, 6).

One **true** God, one **true** Lord, one **true** baptism.

What then would reasonably be expected to comprise the **one true** baptism, and to distinguish it from all other so-called "baptisms"? Would it not be that it was performed in the manner and under the circumstances required by God, as distinguished from the ideas and inventions of men? Could any "baptism" be the **one Baptism** that differed from that described and recorded and commanded in Scripture?

Has man the right of changing the form of baptism, marring its significance and applying it to unsuitable subjects? It seems inconceivable that any should think so, but let us consider some remarks by a renowned and respected leader of Christendom, who reflects the general view of the churches of the world.

The late "Dean" Stanley, a high dignitary of the Church of England (the Episcopal Church), wrote an article in the Nineteenth Century Magazine for October, 1879.

His words are important for they expressed clearly the viewpoint of Christendom at large, and throw a tremendous light on its trend and relation to Scripture. They illustrate the sadly perverted viewpoint that can make abandonment of the commands of God a virtue, and "glory in their shame." He says,

"For the first thirteen centuries the almost universal practice of baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament, and which is the **very meaning** of the word 'baptize'—that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed into the water.

"With few exceptions the whole of the Western Churches have now substituted for the ancient bath the ceremony of sprinkling a few drops of water on the face.

"There is no one who would now wish to go back to the old practice."

Note well the following—

"It had, no doubt, the sanction of the Apostles and their Master. It had the sanction of the venerable churches of the early ages.

"(But) speaking generally, the whole Christian World has decided against it. It is a striking example of the triumph of common sense over the bondage of form and custom."

We would say it was a striking example of what Christ called "making the commandments of God of none effect by your traditions" (Matt. 15:16). Dean Stanley continues:

"The change from immersion to sprinkling has set aside the larger part of the apostolic language regarding baptism, and has altered the very meaning of the word."

* * *

Little comment is needed. The issue is clear. Which side are we on? Surely this is one of the most remarkable and enlightening pieces of writing to be found concerning Christendom's outlook toward God's Word. This eminent church dignitary solemnly approves a practice which he himself admits—yea, even *boasts*—has "set aside the larger part of scriptural language regarding baptism."

What reverence had this man, and the whole system he represents, for the solemn, divine ordinance called by Paul the "**one baptism**" which says Dean Stanley, "common sense" has triumphed over?

The aged Paul said, in his last recorded epistle (2 Tim. 4:3, 4)—

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but will heap unto themselves teachers . . .

"They shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and be turned unto fables."

What is the solution? Where lies safety and assurance? Paul gives the answer in the same epistle (2 Tim. 3:14-17)—

“But continue *thou* in the things which thou hast learned and been assured of.

“From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation . . .

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” And to the same beloved “son in the Faith” he solemnly appeals (1 Tim. 6:20)—

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust!—avoiding profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called.”

Between this reverent and exalted view of the sanctity of God’s Word and the viewpoint of Christendom at large there is an unbridgeable gulf. Christendom’s avowed allegiance to the Bible is only nominal at best. Sometimes not even that, as illustrated by the remarks of Dean Stanley.

If we consider the question of our salvation to be of sufficient importance to warrant the effort, we should ponder well which should be our guide — an apostate, self-contradicting “Christendom,” or the inspired, infallible, unchanging *word of God*.