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HEBREWS 6:1b-2

(“the doctrine of baptisms”)

PARTICULAR MATTERS – THE RITES OF BAPTISM AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS.

INTRODUCTION

This evening we continue to consider the PARTICULAR MATTERS which the author of Hebrews identifies in Hebrews 6:1b-2. We now turn our attention to the RITES OF BAPTISM AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS. These matters are not a part of the PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST but RITES in the church which were administered to those who believed in the PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST. Indeed, belief in the PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST was necessary in order to have the RITES OF BAPTISM AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS administered. In our study tonight we will introduce and examine the RITE OF BAPTISM.

“...THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMS”

Introduction-The Rite of Baptism

1. The language and wording of the author of Hebrews can be confusing here. When he writes, **“OF THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMS,”** he is indicating that the PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST – 1) REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS, 2) FAITH TOWARD GOD, 3) THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, AND 4) ETERNAL JUDGEMENT – are the DOCTRINES **“OF BAPTISM.”** He means they are the doctrines one believes in order to be baptized in and by the CHURCH.
2. The referring to BAPTISM in the plural form, **“BAPTISMS”**, has raised questions and led to confusion as to what the author was referring to here. In that there is only one Christian baptism and the author in this place speaks of baptisms many have wrongly concluded that it is not Christian water baptism that he is speaking of. Some think he is speaking of the WASHINGS or BAPTISMS of the Jews. Others believe he is speaking of both, the baptism of John the Baptist and that of Christ. Still others think he is referring to what is sometimes seen to be THREE SORTS OF GOSPEL BAPTISM-1) Water Baptism; 2) Spirit Baptism; 3) the Baptism of Afflictions. What I believe to be the correct view is best stated by the Puritan John Owen. In his SEVEN VOLUME COMMENTARY ON HEBREWS he writes, **“Wherefore the most general interpretation of the words and meaning of the apostle is, - that although baptism be but one and the same, never to be repeated or reiterated on the same subject, nor is there any other baptism or washing of the same kind, yet because the subjects of it, or those who were baptized, were many, every**

one of them being made partakers of the same baptism in special, that of them all is called “baptisms,” or the baptism of the many.” Owen is correctly stating that “**BAPTISMS**” is a reference to the one baptism that is being administered to many people. It is the same idea that is in the question, “How many baptisms were there today?” That Owen and this interpretation is correct is also seen in that in Scripture water baptism was often followed by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-7) just as it is in our text.

Having now an understanding of what the author of Hebrews means in the words or language he employs let us briefly consider the BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM.

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF WATER BAPTISM

In dealing with the BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM our purpose is not to examine it in an exhaustive sense but to consider the PRINCIPAL or LEADING MATTERS regarding it. To that end, please note the following matters.

1. Baptism is ONE of TWO ordinances Christ instituted to be regularly administered by the church. The other ordinance is the LORDS SUPPER. At this point it is necessary to say a number of brief things concerning the ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH. FIRST, the ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH are a MEANS OF GRACE. Historically, and in the PROTESTANT/REFORMED TRADITION a believer receives GRACE through the WORD OF GOD AND THE APPLICATION OF IT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT and through the ORDINANCES/SACRAMENTS (which are not intended to be separated from the WORD). The ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH teaches there are SEVEN ORDINANCES, and that GRACE is ONLY COMMUNICATED through the ORDINANCES. In the ROMAN CACTHOLIC CHURCH there is ONLY ONE MEANS OF GRACE and that is the ORDINANCES. At the opposite extreme of Roman Catholicism is the view of the QUAKERS. The QUAKERS view the INTERNAL OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (the ‘inner light’) as the ONLY MEANS OF GRACE. Between these two positions is the view that the WORD OF GOD is alone the MEANS OF GRACE. But as I noted before the TRADITIONAL PROTESTANT/REFORMED VIEW is that the WORD OF GOD APPLIED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT and the ORDINANCES OF BAPTISM AND THE LORDS SUPPER ARE THE MEANS by which GOD’S GRACE is COMMUNICATED to the believer. SECOND, speaking of the ORDINANCES/SACRAMENTS as a MEANS OF GRACE what is the PROPER DEFINITION of an ORDINANCE/SACRAMENT. An ORDINANCE/SACRAMENT may be defined as, A HOLY RITE INSTITUTED BY CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH IN WHICH BY SENSIBLE SIGNS THE GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST AND THE BENEFITS BELONGING TO IT ARE SIGNIFIED/REPRESENTED, SEALED, APPLIED AND EXHIBITED TO BELIEVERS TO INCREASE THEIR FAITH AND ALL OTHER GRACES, AND IN WHICH THE BELIEVER GIVES AN OUTWARD EXPRESSION AND COMMITMENT TO THEIR FAITH AND ALLIEGIANCE TO GOD AND IN WHICH BELIEVERS ARE IDENTIFIED WITH ONE ANOTHER AND DISTINGUISHED FROM UNBELIEVERS AND THOSE WITHOUT. If you would like a SIMPLE DEFINITION, **A SACRAMENT IS AN OUTWARD VISIBLE SIGN OF AN INWARD SPIRITUAL GRACE.** THIRD, there are TWO PRINCIPAL PARTS of a SACRAMENT – (1) the outward, visible and sensible sign, and (2) the inward spiritual grace signified by the outward sign. A useful illustration of what we are speaking is the wedding ring. The wedding ring in one respect is not essential but it is important. It seals the statement that has already been made. It makes the statement in a different way. The person who has the ring is reminded of what it represents. The act of giving

and putting on that ring is an action on the part of the person giving it which is the sealing of a promise to the person to whom it is given. The woman to whom the ring is given already has the love of the one giving it. He is not giving her more love he is simply EXPRESSING that love in a different way, and she is receiving that love in a NEW, DIFFERENT and SPECIAL way. FOURTH, the wedding ring helps us to understand HOW the ORDINANCES/SACRAMENTS convey GRACE. They do not ADD to that GRACE they simply EXPRESS it to us in a DIFFERENT MANNER. They SIGN to us, SEAL to us and CONVEY to us in a DIFFERENT WAY the GRACE and BENEFITS of Christ's REDEMPTION. ALSO, the ORDINANCES/SACRAMENTS are a VISIBLE SYMBOL or SIGN and REMEMBRANCE to us of our RELATIONSHIP and MEMBERSHIP in the Church. In this manner they also CONVEY GRACE to us.

2. Though Baptism is a RECOGNIZED ORDINANCE/SACRAMENT of the Church - equally saintly, spiritual, and learned believers hold DIFFERENT OPINIONS CONCERNING IT. For this reason, as with certain other doctrines, we must approach this doctrine with a certain amount of caution and in a Christian manner, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We must be careful not to be GLIB, or make overly GENERALIZED, and INCORRECT DOGMATIC ASSERTIONS.
3. With our previous point in mind we observe, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out, **"There are THREE MAIN POSITIONS on this subject: the paedo (infant) Baptists, the Baptists, and the Salvation Army, together with the Quakers."** The difference in these positions will be noted and highlighted as we consider the doctrine of Baptism in greater detail. Before beginning our detailed consideration of baptism and for a bit of historical perspective concerning the practice of infant baptism and the different understanding of baptism in the history, let us note what Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, **"In the early church there was no definite reference to infant baptism until AD 175. That silence does not prove, however, that infant baptism was not practiced before that date. Another important piece of evidence comes from Tertullian, who was a great man in the early Church at the end of the second century. Now Tertullian changed his views of this subject and became an opponent of infant baptism. So there is surely a very strong case for saying that in Tertullian's day it could not be established that infant baptism was taught and practiced by the apostles, for if it was, a man like Tertullian would never have spoken against it in the way that he did. Another very interesting bit of evidence is that the great Saint Augustine, whose mother was a Christian, was not baptized as an infant. Again, you cannot lay too much weight on that argument, but it is significant in that it demonstrates that infant baptism was not the universal practice. As we go on through the centuries, we find in general, that right up until the Protestant Reformation there was only infant baptism. The main Protestant Reformers continued that practice, but towards the end of the sixteenth century a new body of people arose who were called Anabaptists because they believed in rebaptizing on confession of faith (the prefix *ana* means 'again'), when one was old enough to be able to make a personal statement."**
4. THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM – The brief historical overview given us by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones brings us to our more detailed examination of Baptism and we begin with the question OF THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM. As stated before, concerning the ORDINANCES/SACRAMENTS in general, Baptism is DESIGNED to SIGNIFY, SEAL, and CONVEY to believers the GRACE and BENEFITS of

CHRIST'S REDEMPTION. Lloyd-Jones writes concerning this, **"When people are baptized they should be conscious that grace is conveyed to them personally in this special way so that what they have believed in general, they now know is theirs...we should regard it as God saying, 'Now this is the way that I have chosen to tell you that my grace is given to you in particular.'**"

At this point it is important to recognize what PARTICULAR BENEFITS OF CHRIST REDEMPTION are being SIGNIFIED and SEALED to us in Baptism. Particularly, in the first sense, Baptism is a SIGN of my UNION to and IDENTIFICATION with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what is being indicated and emphasized concerning Baptism in the book of Acts when it is recorded as having been done in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, or the Lord. This is also the implication of the meaning and purpose of Baptism in Matthew 28:19 where the disciples are instructed by Christ to baptize in **"THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST."** This I believe to be the PRIMARY MEANING and PURPOSE of Baptism. Particularly, in the second sense, Baptism is a sign and seal of CLEANSING/PURIFICATION from sin and the guilt of sin. In this it is a SIGN and SEAL of the GRACE of the REMISSION of our sins, and our JUSTIFICATION. This is Peter's point in Acts 2:38, **"THEN PETER SAID UNTO THEM, REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST."** When Peter says **"FOR"** he does not mean 'unto' but rather, 'because' of. Baptism is not the MEANS of our forgiveness, but it is the ASSURANCE of it. Also, this idea of Baptism being a SIGN and SEAL of WASHING and CLEANSING is seen in Acts 22:16 and I Peter 3:21. Thirdly, in a particular sense, Baptism is a sign of REGENERATION. In this respect it is a sign of our having received the Holy Spirit. Baptism does not regenerate a person, but it is a sign a person has been regenerated and has received the Holy Spirit. This is implied in the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 where he declares that as he has baptized with water Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is also the implication of Peter in Acts 2:38 that we have previously quoted. Fourthly, and finally, in a particular sense, Baptism is a SIGN and SEAL of a believer's membership in the Church, which is the Body of Christ. This I believe to be the implication of I Corinthians 12:13 where the believer is spoken of as being **"BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY."** Though I believe this is a reference to a work of the Spirit in uniting us to Christ spiritually I do think it also implies that this is SIGNIFIED in water baptism.

5. THE SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM – Who is it that is to be baptized? Here is where the question of INFANT and BELIEVERS baptism arises. I believe the Scriptures teach, as I believe our present text does, only professing believers are to be baptized. Only those who are able to believe and profess the **"PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST"** which are the **"DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMS."** Peter on the Day of Pentecost said, **"REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED,"** and like John the Baptist in Matthew 3, made repentance and faith necessary to the administration of baptism. Likewise, is not this the implication in Acts 8:27-39, where Phillip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch, and the Ethiopian asks about baptism and Phillip replies, **"IF THOU BELIEVEST WITH ALL THINE HEART, THOU MAYEST."** Though there are numerous other arguments to be noted for both the INFANT and BELIEVERS baptism position our purpose here is to primarily state what we believe to be the Biblical teaching. Having stated who I believe to be the true subjects of baptism I do not believe that we as a local church are to deny membership to anyone who has been baptized as an infant and believes that to be sufficient.

6. THE MODE OF BAPTISM – What is to be the MODE OF BAPTISM? How is it to be administered? And here there are two main schools of thought: sprinkling/pouring and immersion. Historically, the Church has practiced both, even the Roman Catholic Church. Biblically, and it may shock some of you that I say this, I think it is inconclusive. Baptists will argue that immersion is the only acceptable mode of baptism and any baptism performed by any other mode is not a valid baptism. The Baptist position is 1) primarily based on the meaning of the Greek word, *baptizo*, 2) the biblical passages in which the subjects of baptism are said to arise out of the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:39), and 3) what they believe baptism pictures and symbolizes based on Romans 6:3-4. In response to these arguments, it is 1) pointed out that among Greek scholars there is not universal agreement as to the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*, 2) the references to rising out of the water may simply be speaking of them coming out of the water, and 3) the reference to baptism in Romans 6:3-4 is not the rite of water baptism. It is for these reasons I believe the Scriptures are inconclusive with regard to the MODE OF BAPTISM. At Pine Drive Reformed Church, we baptize all individuals by both immersion and pouring. Immersion proclaims our union to Christ and pouring the role of the Holy Spirit in our union to Christ. As well I do not believe we are to deny local church membership to any who have a different opinion as to the MODE OF BAPTISM.
7. THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM – Though Baptism is not ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION it is IMPORTANT in relation to our SALVATION. Roman Catholicism wrongly teaches that it is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL. On the opposite extreme is the teaching of the Salvation Army and the Quakers. They teach that there is no IMPORTANCE to baptism whatsoever. The CORRECT VIEW I believe to be that which is the Protestant and Reformed position. This view teaches that Baptism though not ESSENTIAL it is IMPORTANT and OBLIGATORY because it was instituted and commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles. (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38, 10:48)

In conclusion, as I stated out the beginning, BAPTISM is a subject on which equally saintly, spiritual, and learned believers differ and is therefore to be approached with caution, in a Christian manner and in the Spirit. I hope that you will receive this lesson on BAPTISM in just that manner.