

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## IS MY BAPTISM VALID?

### Part Two

by Lee Moses

“*One baptism*” (Ephesians 4:5). This is the number of baptisms that God has authorized for man today. Yet countless different baptisms are being administered and received every week, all by those who would claim that their goal is to please God and serve Christ. Thankfully, God’s word penetrates through this murk of manmade tradition and opinion, enabling each of us to answer the question, “Is my baptism valid?”

Last month, it was seen from God’s word that baptism must be immersion, it must be in water, and it must be administered by another person. Scriptural baptism also must follow the necessary prerequisites of hearing (or reading) God’s instructions on the subject, belief in Christ, repentance from sin, and confession of Christ. We will conclude by considering four other questions the New Testament provides us which serve to answer the larger question, “Is my baptism valid?”

#### 5. Was my baptism “for the remission of sins”?

The apostle Peter clearly stated the purpose of baptism: “*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*” (Acts 2:38, emphasis added).

The word “for” is used in this phrase “to denote purpose”; and “*for the remission of sins*” could just as well be translated, “so that sins might be forgiven.”<sup>1</sup> Christ’s purpose in ordaining baptism was for the salvation of men’s souls (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21); and man’s purpose in receiving baptism must be the same. If one is baptized believing that his sins have already been forgiven, he is not baptized with the “*one baptism*” of the New Testament. If one is baptized with his object being other than the remission of his sins, he is not baptized with the “*one baptism*” of the New Testament. While the religious world administers many different baptisms for many different purposes, the apostle Peter clearly stated the purpose of the “*one baptism*” of the New Testament—“*for the remission of sins.*”

#### 6. Did I “obey from the heart”?

The sixth chapter of Romans speaks at length of the implications of Scriptural baptism, in particular contrasting the spiritual states of a person prior to and following baptism. Thus the apostle Paul exclaims, “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you*” (verse 17). Obedience to the Gospel in baptism requires

sincere motivation proceeding from the heart; the seat of one’s intellect, emotion, and will.<sup>2</sup>

So one should ask himself, “Did I know what I was doing?” One cannot accidentally obey the truth without having understood the truth (compare with Matthew 13:19; John 8:32; Acts 2:41). This does not mean that one needs to understand exactly how Scriptural baptism takes away sins, nor that one needs to understand every fine point of doctrine found in the Bible. But one needs to know why he is being baptized.

One who is immersed against his will cannot be said to have “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered him.” Neither can it be said of one who is baptized merely to please his parents, friends, or significant other. One’s intellect, emotions, and will must be wholly given to submitting himself to God in the glorious, beautiful, and crucial reception of baptism.

#### 7. Was I of the age of accountability?

While there is no clear numerical age one must reach in order to be Scripturally baptized, there is a point of mental maturity one must reach. For one to understand what he is doing when he is baptized, he must have attained an age where he is capable of understanding his need and purpose for being baptized.

This by no means places children who have not yet reached this age among the lost. The apostle

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P.O. Box 251  
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Lee Moses ..... EDITOR  
Phone ..... (870) 625-3217  
E-Mail ..... cocfcgn@centurytel.net  
Website ... www.fultoncountygospelnews.org  
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Paul stated, “*For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*” (Romans 7:9). Of course, Paul had been born under the Law of Moses—the “commandment came” to him in the sense that he was now accountable to it, found to be in sin, and therefore spiritually dead. But prior to that time he had been spiritually alive. Jesus said, “*Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 19:14). Children possess the nature that citizens of God’s kingdom possess. Upon another occasion Jesus told His disciples, “*Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (18:3). Jesus was not saying that the disciples needed to become as those who forsook God’s commandments and

were dead in sin, but as those who remained spiritually alive. Children who have not yet reached the age of accountability can neither properly understand baptism—nor can they need baptism.

**8. Into what church was I baptized?**

Most religious bodies professing affiliation with Christ claim that the baptisms they practice place one into their respective churches. However, the “*one baptism*” of the New Testament only relates to “*one body*” (Ephesians 4:5-6), which is the church of which Christ is head (1:22-23). When the glad recipients of God’s word in the first century were baptized, the Lord added them to His church (Acts 2:41, 47). None of them were added by men to manmade denominations. They had no need to be, for as the apostle Peter wrote them, “*Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth*” (1 Peter 1:22). One who is baptized to be added to a manmade denomination cannot be said to obey God’s truth, for he has merely obeyed a tradition of men (compare with Matthew 15:9). Thus his soul has not been “purified,” but remains lost in sin.

**CONCLUSION**

It is sad and unfortunate that so many invalid baptisms are being taught and practiced in the religious world today. Yet the New Testament teaches but one valid baptism for mankind today. For one to ensure that his baptism is valid, he should ask himself the questions that have been discussed in these two articles:

- 1. Was my baptism immersion?**
- 2. Was my baptism in water?**
- 3. Was my baptism administered by another person?**
- 4. Did I complete the necessary prerequisites?**

**5. Was my baptism “for the remission of sins”?****6. Did I “obey from the heart”?****7. Was I of the age of accountability?****8. Into what church was I baptized?**

While this may strike some as overly complicated, it comes down to one question: “**Did I do what the Bible says to do?**” The conversions of the New Testament did not usually take a long time to occur, because these things are not terribly difficult to understand for one who truly desires to please God.

Upon an occasion in Ephesus, the apostle Paul encountered some men who had been baptized with the intention of pleasing God, but they had not been baptized with the “*one baptism*” of the New Testament (Acts 19:1-3). Paul then taught them correctly, and “*When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (verse 4-5).

Have you been Scripturally baptized? If not, your response should be the same as those earnest God-seekers whom Paul encountered.

*And now why tarriest thou?  
arise, and be baptized, and  
wash away thy sins, calling  
on the name of the Lord  
(Acts 22:26).*

<sup>1</sup> “*eis*,” in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 290. Matthew 26:28 is the verse particularly under discussion here, but Acts 2:38 is cross-referenced under this usage, and uses the same exact phrase as that found in Matthew 26:28.

<sup>2</sup> “*kardia*,” BDAG, pp. 508-509.

## STEPHEN: AN EXAMPLE OF PROVIDENCE

by Chris Perry

All that we know of the biblical character Stephen is contained in the better part of two chapters, Acts 6 and 7. In such a short section of the Inspired Record, this man is able to etch an indelible mark on the face of Christianity. Stephen, along with Philip the Evangelist and five others, was chosen to assist in the care of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1-6). His character was obviously great, for he is described several times as “*a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*” (6:5, 8), a statement indicating his faithfulness and zeal for the cause of Christ. As well, Stephen took an active role in preaching the Gospel. Shortly after his appointment by the apostles, he is described as doing “*great wonders and miracles among the people*” and preaching to the Jewish leaders of the day. After one such sermon before the Sanhedrin, in which he outlined Israel’s history of rebellion against God, Stephen closed with this indictment:

*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).*

His audience was “*cut to the heart*” following this sermon, “*and they gnashed on him with their teeth*”

(verse 54). Ultimately, their anger exploded in a flurry of stones; and Stephen, after two very Christ-like statements, “*fell asleep*” (v. 60).

The interested student of the Bible might be left with several questions regarding the way in which God deals with man. These questions might include:

### WHERE WAS GOD WHILE ALL OF THIS WAS HAPPENING?

Many who read of an event like the one just described might ask, “If God is so loving and concerned, where was He when Stephen was killed?” In fact, this question or a variant of it is asked all over the world when loved ones die, when hardships arise, and when tragedy strikes. Often, enemies of God and His people look on the tragedies that befall Christians and ask, “*Where is thy God?*” (Psalm 42:10). However, a closer examination of Acts 7 reveals the whereabouts of our Lord and Savior: “*But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God*” (v. 55). God, as manifested through the posture of His Son, is infinitely interested in and concerned about the well-being of His people. Jesus is not a high priest “*who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities...*” (Hebrews 4:15). Instead, He is “*touched,*” literally, “*feels sympathy for*” or “*has compassion toward.*”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Godhead does care.

### WHY DOES GOD ALLOW BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN?

The companion question to the first is, “If God is so interested, why does He allow such tragedies to affect His people?” And this question, just like the first, is lifted

up almost universally. Gideon, who would later come to judge or lead God’s nation, asked, “*Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?*” (Judges 6:13). In answer to this question, religious individuals often run in one of two directions: either they deny God’s intervention at all or they manufacture ways in which God *directly* intervenes. But problems exist with both philosophies. If one believes that God does not intervene (a system of belief known as deism) then God becomes a Being Who does not care about man, but instead sleeps soundly as the clock He set in motion ticks away toward chaos. Such an opinion of God violates His very nature (1 John 4:8).

As well, if one holds that God miraculously, directly works to influence the outcome of events today, then he is met by contrary teachings in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul was describing the place of miracles in God’s scheme when he revealed that “*when that which is perfect [the completely recorded revelation of God] is come, then that which is in part [the system of miracles] shall be done away*” (1 Corinthians 13:10). It must also be noticed that miraculous gifts could only be passed on through the laying-on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14-17), and the apostles are dead and buried. But just as importantly, if God works directly to influence the lives of *some* but not *everyone*, then God becomes a respecter of persons (Romans 2:11). A lady came into this author’s office one day seeking guidance. Her parents had died when the car they were driving was swept away by floodwaters. She had been influenced by so-called “faith healers” and others who advocate modern-day miracles, and

she asked a simple but poignant question: "Why does God miraculously save some people when He refused to save my mother and father?" In her way of thinking, this question could not be answered.

The answer to the question, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to Christians" is found in a third alternative. Going back to Acts, it is said following Stephen's death that "... at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem..." (8:1). Saul of Tarsus "made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (v. 3). However, verse 4 reveals an interesting fact: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word."

Thus, the answer is not found in subjective, man-respecting "miracles," nor in making God a sleeping security guard, but in providence. God did not sweep down and miraculously stop the Jews from stoning Stephen; neither did He miraculously stop His Son from being crucified. Likewise, He will not miraculously stop a faithful Christian woman from dying of cancer, or a godly man from having a heart attack, or the host of other tragedies and hardships that arise. However, He *can*, and if He chooses, *will* use events in the same way He used the stoning of Stephen—to accomplish His purpose. It was not God's will for Stephen to die; the Jews made a choice, and God allowed them to do so, just as He allows us to make choices (Genesis 1:26; Ezekiel 18:20; et al.). But the Almighty used their wicked decision to see that the Gospel was spread throughout the reaches of the Roman world. And He can work today in the same manner. The decisions that man makes, whether good or bad, and

the events that take place in the world can be used by a God powerful enough and wise enough to bring about through those decisions and events whatever His will dictates.

When we as Christians bring to our Father petitions and supplications, as we labor and struggle through the daily course of life, we can be assured that He "worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Each of us can be confident that when we submit to His will (James 4:13-15), we are in the hands of the One who is in control and has in mind the best interests of His beloved creation.

<sup>1</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*.

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### GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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