

# GOODNEWS LETTER

No. 203 February 13, 2008

---

## AUTHORITY KEEPS BAPTISM PURE

"And I will give unto you the keys (authority) of the Kingdom of heaven," Matthew 16:19.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them..." Matthew 28:19.

Serving God requires that we correctly judge how sin operates within us. The power of sin has to be broken at the cross. When we believe in Jesus, we are dead to sin. Then, faith doesn't stop but, continues on as we bury the old dead man (as declared by God) in baptism.

However, if our view of baptism is not correct, freedom from the constant and nagging sin cannot occur. This is the reason that we can not place faith within the physical side of life. Salvation begins at the cross; not in the water.

Keeping a physical approach to serving God was Israel's problem. They tried "putting new wine into old bottles," Mt 9:17 - incorporating Old Covenant fasting into the New Covenant. Their desire was "to be under the Law." To which Paul, rhetorically asked them, "Do you not hear the Law," Galatians 4:21.

This kind of physical thought didn't end with the Jews. There are so many well-meaning people today, attempting to deal with sin in the same manner - in a physical way. At birth and all their lives, they attack sin with physical objects and think their faith is bolstered.

It's amazing when we scan the religious scene and see all kinds of physical support that is added to faith. Some need glass idols or metal images. Others place a piece of plastic on their dash boards. And, it's a rare person that doesn't utilize religious days to exhibit their faith.

In the mind of the religious, doing something physical is an avenue where their faith is completed. The **narrow way** of Jesus is not understood, at all. Thus, faith - plus nothing, minus nothing, just isn't enough to rely upon.

In reality, truth and faith go together. And, true faith begins by rejecting any and all physical objects. Such things just get in the way of faith. By adding any physical act to faith, robs faith of its meaning. It may border on, if not, even be a blasphemous act. There is "one Mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus," 1st Timothy 2:5. But, oh! How men justify their actions!

## RELIGIOUS METHODS OF ADDRESSING SIN

No matter which group we cite, it's pretty much the same approach; all include the act of baptism within their faith framework. Nearly all so-called churches

teach that Baptism comes before one can be saved. To stay saved, religious works are required to follow baptism.

Too many teachers stress the doctrine of baptism, making it synonymous with salvation. While, it may be stated differently from church to church, the end result is: **"Unless baptism is administered, salvation isn't complete."**

The Catholic teaching on baptism says that Adam's sin is washed away in the baptismal font; hence, babies are baptized. Protestant teaching isn't far behind. Pentecostals and the Church of Christ teach that baptism is part of salvation. If you aren't baptized, you are not saved.

However, can a repentant sinner be saved without being dunked in the tank? And, what about faith? Does faith precede baptism?

For those answers, we cannot do any better than go to the original administrator of baptism, John, the Baptist, himself. He baptized only those who were **"confessing their sins," Mt 3:6**. Since babies can't confess, John baptized no babies.

Further, John forbade baptism on two occasions, at least. He demanded **"fruits meet for repentance"** (3:7) before he administered the ordinance. Thus, confession and fruits preceded baptism in John's day. Baptism cannot be a part of confession and fruits; now, can they? It's confession and fruits, then baptism. Missionary Baptist call it a **"KNOW SO SALVATION."**

Biblical baptism is narrow and restrictive. The importance of baptism is, not so much when one is baptized but, who has the authority to baptize. And, when authority is recognized and observed, baptism remains pure.

If, there is no proper administrator who has been commissioned to baptize; such as, John or a New Covenant Church, then there can be no proper candidate, either. If authority is by-passed, then people just get wet, no matter what kind of view they have on baptism and salvation. Jesus didn't walk 30 miles, seeking out John, the Baptist, simply for health reasons.

Authority takes front stage everywhere in the Bible; especially, in **Acts, chapter 12**, at the beginning of mission work. We find that not everyone who was baptized by John had automatic authority to administer the ordinance.

Apollo had John's baptism, but those twelve men he baptized had to be baptized again (Acts 12). Actually, when Paul baptized the converts of Apollo, they received baptism for the first time; as witnessed by the Holy Spirit's blessing of tongues (need I say languages?).

Paul was the first Anabaptist (re-baptizer); which, leads to the next point of Scriptural Authority and baptism. We must catch the meaning, here. For, in the

book of Acts, we see John's baptismal Authority transferred to the New Covenant Church. It took place on the day of Pentecost.

Look in the upper room and you'll see about 120 members, only. Certainly, they were many more saved folks than 120; but, on Pentecost, those are the ones who received the Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 2:15). The gathered Jews were amazed and under conviction, becoming "pricked in their hearts" at the 120 and their message, when "the Spirit gave them utterance," (2:7).

The transferred power, as Peter explains, was a prophecy, "which was spoken by the prophet Joel," (2:16). 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 Spirit," Acts 2:38. (In my view, "baptism for remission of sins" lines up with "walking in the light," I Jn 1:7-9. In our daily walk, forgiveness is required for continuance of service; for, we sin and must have daily cleansing by God's grace; just as we were saved, initially. But, believers have to go to the "right" place where authority (Gk, 'exousia') has been given by God. It has always been the case. Believers receive their cleansing in Israel, in the Old Cov., and the church, in the New.)

**BAPTISM AUTHORITY WITHIN THE 'RED SEA' SCENE.** It was the water that separated Israel from a pursuing angry nation of Egyptians. On Israel's Exodus, Paul explains, "They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea," I Corinthians 10.

How spiritually illustrative the Exodus account is. Here, we see the salvation plan, from start to finish. It reveals how God initially dealt with sin by applying the blood of the Lamb to each house. Now, that His people were 'Good to go,' they walked away freely, sandal by sandal.

Then, in hot pursuit, here comes sin in the persons of Pharaoh's boys. What to do? Egypt was coming after their slaves, closing in, furiously. Israel's escape looked awfully bleak; for, nothing but water lie ahead of them.

But, Moses was faithful in all his house (He 3:2). Israel found that God's salvation, not only removed them from bondage, it also removed Israel from the presence of a worldly Egypt, as well. Under God's commission, Moses lifted his rod of authority and all of Israel passed safely through the waters and into the care of God, Almighty. All that Israel had to do was listen to Moses. He had the authority.

Baptism means separation from the world; which, the 'Red Sea parting,' clearly shows. In the watery grave - in either Covenant, the picture is vividly produced. Every Israeli crossed to the other side, finding life, by going through the water and into God's control.

Like the water of the Red Sea, the church ordinance of baptism separates the spiritual life from the fleshly life. We leave the 'Law-life' of the flesh and enter the 'Spirit-life' in our spirits.

This is seen in Romans, the 6th and 8th chapters, where we are "buried with him (Jesus) by baptism into death," V 4; and, understand that, "...to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace," V 6. We may enter the promise of God and walk in His control or, we can rebel, complain and die in the wilderness of the world. But, our baptismal commitment will cause us to listen to the Head of the house, faithfully.

And, as the believer buries the old man in the watery grave, another truth comes to light. At the same time we are buried in the water, just like it was in the Red Sea, the world is destroyed behind us **by the same water that separated us.**

The truth is, unsaved people cannot enter the baptismal waters, safely. They drown. If one is not saved before he is baptized - if the blood has not been applied to the door post of the heart, then the ordinance will condemn him.

Today, the shouting words of John, the Baptist, echo over every baptismal scene, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Mt 3:7. Do we hear what John is saying?

The blessing of New Covenant baptism is that every redeemed believer comes out of the water and gives his life to be under the control of the Lord. That's why the church, alone; and, not individual men, has the right of commission to baptize.

So, it is no mystery that the church has a Head, leading His people in the same way that Moses led Israel. All we have to do is listen to the Head, Jesus Christ - accept the "keys to the kingdom" and, "Go, baptizing the nations."

Without controversy, when God's authority is exercised in the ordinance of baptism, His people walk away from the world, in freedom, and into service.