

Baptism and the Church

(continued)

III. BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH IN THE BAPTIST MOVEMENT OF TODAY

If the account given so far is in accordance with the New Testament witness of baptism and the Church, how does Baptist practice of today correspond to the New Testament pattern? Some questions and problems of current interest will first be pointed out, and in a concluding chapter three standpoints will be described, which include different Baptist answers to certain questions raised in this chapter.

(1) *Is baptism regarded in Baptist churches as an incorporation into both the local church and the universal Church, the body of Christ?*

According to predominant Baptist theory and practice believers' baptism is looked upon as the gateway of the local church. Briefly expressed, you become a Baptist by being baptized. But is this fact that you are baptized and become a Baptist equal to turning Christian? This is evidently not the case according to current Baptist opinion. A man who has come to faith in a Baptist church is regarded as a Christian in spite of the fact that he will perhaps hesitate with his baptism for years. When he finally is baptized, what does that mean? He becomes a member of a local Baptist church. Is he incorporated into the universal church, the body of Christ, at the same time? If this question is answered in the affirmative, what about his faith before his baptism? Did it not mean his participation in the justification in Christ and by that in his Church? If the question is answered in the negative, this must mean that you can be a member of the body of Christ without belonging to a local church. With such a way of looking at the matter the connection between the local church and the universal one is dissolved, and the membership of the local church becomes purely a matter of form. The solution of these difficulties must be found by a new emphasis in Baptist preaching of baptism. The

indissoluble connection between the local church and the universal one must be stressed in a new way, and if Baptists want to continue preaching baptism in accordance with the New Testament they must seriously actualize the New Testament view of believers' baptisms as the gate both to the local church and the universal Church of Christ. Otherwise the Baptist churches like the churches baptizing infants contribute to making the demarcation line between the Church of Christ and the world indistinct, the demarcation line which water-baptism should be.

(2) *Denomination and Church*

From the Biblical evidence it is clear that by believers' baptism man is incorporated at the same time into a local church and the universal Church, the body of Christ. But does the Bible support the view that by baptism man also becomes a member of a "union," a denomination, a church among many others? Certain Christian movements have tried to solve this problem by pushing aside both the thought of the denomination and of the universal, visible Church. But in doing so they make two fatal mistakes. On the one hand they lose sight of the fundamental Biblical conception of the unity of the Church, since it is the indivisible body of Christ. On the other hand, they do not see the organic conception which existed between the primitive local churches, especially associated with the ministry of the apostles and made clear in the thought of the people of the new covenant. Within different church traditions this organic connection has been preserved in different ways, e.g. by the episcopal form of organization and the synodal one. Congregationalist tradition, to which the Baptist movement belongs, has rightly reacted against exaggerated tendencies to centralization and concentration of power in other ecclesiastical forms, tendencies which have been looked upon as inconsistent with the essence of the New Testament Church. But if by your opposition you are led to abstain from any kind of organizing connection between the local churches, you will lose the connecting link between them that apostles and evangelists formed in the primitive church. They were not bound to any particular local church when performing their services. In our age too the intimate solidarity between the local churches must be brought to an expression; otherwise the consciousness of being *one* people in Christ will vanish. If the denominational organization with its ministries fills the same task as apostles and evangelists in the primitive church it will certainly find support in the New Testament. The proof of its consistency with the New Testament is the question whether by its help the gospel is preached better and the apostolic exhortation "Bear ye one another's bur-

dens" followed more faithfully. The denomination, however, must not obscure the thought of the unity of the whole Christian Church. As the *Church* was split and the *churches* appeared, the unity of baptism as well was split and there developed several baptisms. But historical development cannot and must not nullify the belief in the unity of the Church and of baptism, as we all have one Lord and one God who is Father of all *Eph. iv 4-6*. The yearning and labour for the unity of the Church involves *at the same time* a desire to re-establish the unity of baptism.

The different existing denominations are a result of human imperfection. From the view-point of faith, their existence is deeply unsatisfactory, and they form a constant reminder of the condition of limitation under which we are now living. When the endeavour to overcome and remedy the division of the Church and of baptism is pure and free from human lust for power it is supported by central New Testament conceptions. Such a remedy, however, must not lead to uniformity. Schism and diversity are two quite different things. Schism is sin, but diversity is richness and grace in accordance with the very nature of creation. In practice this must mean that the Baptist churches cannot place themselves outside the ecumenical movement in so far as the latter remains true to its deepest motives. Such an ecumenical commitment involves several problems which will be illustrated in the last part of this paper.

(3) *Baptism, Church and the Lord's Supper*

In the primitive church baptism directly entitled a person to full church-fellowship and participation in communion at the Lord's table. The breaking of bread was the deepest form of church membership. The schism of the Church already described resulted in division at the Lord's table. One form of ecumenical co-operation is the effort to establish inter-communion across denominational boundaries. Within the Baptist churches, too, there has been for some time now one group practising "open" communion. Both "closed" and "open" communion involve difficulties, which will now be demonstrated by a description of three possible Baptist standpoints. It is characteristic of them all that they want to master the problem of infant baptism, re-baptism, the Lord's Supper, ecumenicity and proselytism. They make the many meanings of Baptist thought clear both on the practical and theoretical level, and they illustrate the necessity of thinking out the Baptist message and programme of action anew against the background of the ecclesiastical situation of today.

IV. BAPTIST FAITH AND ECUMENICITY. THREE POSITIONS

1. "No" to Infant Baptism as a Christian Baptism. Closed Communion.

According to one school of Baptist thought infant baptism is not a Christian baptism but a "church ceremony" or whatever one may like to call it. Likewise it is a common Baptist view that baptism should be regarded as essential for the existence of the Christian Church. Consequently a denomination baptizing infants cannot be a Christian church in a real sense. There is lacking one of its essential characteristics. If the Lord's Supper is a fellowship meal of those believing and baptized, it is impossible for Baptists to enter into communion with such "churches" and their "unbaptized" members. They are not "churches" but "communion societies," to use a term from the Swedish revival movement of the nineteenth century. If, according to Baptist principle, we stick to the words of the Great Commission—"Go ye therefore and teach all nations"—the consequence must be that the other "churches" are regarded as *objects of mission*. The latter say that they are Christian churches without following the clear words of the New Testament regarding believers' baptism. Consequently they must be challenged to begin to baptize and thus *become real churches*. The baptism of people already "sprinkled" as children is not a re-baptism but their first baptism. Under these conditions all ecumenical co-operation on an equal level is impossible for Baptists. They can either choose the way of Rome and place themselves outside all church ecumenicity and exhort all other churches "Come back to the Church, the Mother." (Christian co-operation on the individual and personal level remains, of course, possible in the same way as it is for Roman Catholics who are interested in it and have the permission of the Pope.) Or the Orthodox Church can serve as a pattern, which takes the same position *within* the ecumenical movement. "Not until you accept our confessional basis (the decisions of the ecumenical councils) and Orthodox tradition do you represent the true Church of Christ." Instead of co-operation, *proselytism* must be the Baptist call and task in relation to the other churches. This means that if the latter cannot be won in their entirety for Baptist faith and practise, which is unlikely, Baptists ought to endeavour to win as many as possible of their individual members for their view of baptism and the Church. In many cases this consistent and exclusive attitude has contributed to giving the Baptist movement inner strength and outer success.

2. "No" to Infant Baptism. Open Communion

Many Baptists hesitate before this logical coherent consequence of their own conception of Baptism and the Church. The adherents of believers' baptism are no longer exposed to persecution from the side of the official churches baptizing infants, as was the case, for instance, in sixteenth century Germany and nineteenth century Scandinavia. Instead, most Baptist churches live in fellowship and co-operation with paedobaptist churches, and there is no desire to deprive these churches of their true, believing members. As a denomination the Swedish Baptist Union, for example, takes an active part in ecumenical work on a national level (e.g. in the Free Church Federal Council and the Swedish Ecumenical Council) and elsewhere some ten Baptist Unions are members of the World Council of Churches. This co-operation in ecumenical work on local and denominational levels reveals how theory and practise fall apart within the Baptist movement. In theory, Baptists recognize only believers' baptism as Christian baptism and consequently only their own church as the true Church of Christ on earth. But, in fact, most Baptists of today do not interpret their own spiritual position like this. They acknowledge other Christian churches existing side by side with those practising believers' baptism, and they act according to this conviction. Thereby the first standpoint has been dismissed as out of touch with realities, not realizable and fundamentally foreign to the spirit of the New Testament. Other ways must be found which make both Baptist participation in ecumenical co-operation possible and grant liberty to realize and proclaim the Baptist ideal of baptism and the Church.

The New Testament knows only *one* baptism and *one* Church, the undivided body of Christ. But we are living in a Church situation, which is quite different from the one of the New Testament. The one Church has been divided into the many churches and denominations which all think that they practise Christian baptism and that they are true Christian churches. The New Testament authors cannot give any immediate direction in a situation which was unknown and foreign to them, even though tendencies to splits began to appear even at that early stage. We are therefore forced by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to find a way through for the Baptist movement of today, and this attempt must also manifest itself in an attempt to formulate and motivate the result theologically.

The second alternative implies that according to established Baptist usage every baptism of infants is denied the character of a Christian baptism but at the same time ecumenical co-operation is acknowledged and open communion is practised. This means in its turn that baptism is not regarded as a pre-requisite for the Lord's

Supper; every believer in Christ can sit down at the Lord's table irrespective of his being baptized or not. Thereby a distinction is made between the church which consists of those who believe and are baptized and the congregation celebrating the holy supper, which is made up of the believers in Christ. This distinction can scarcely be made from the New Testament. When therefore one branch of the English Baptist movement in the seventeenth century with John Bunyan as its best-known representative practised "open membership" as well, this was a quite consistent attitude. This "open" Baptist line implies that on one side believers' baptism is kept as the only thinkable Christian baptism, and on the other side, unbaptized believers in Christ are granted holy communion, and in certain cases even church membership. The dualism between the "strict" attitude and the "open" one has asserted itself throughout the whole of Baptist history. The strict Baptist line has been predominant but the tendency towards open communion is increasing. Open communion is now practised in the whole Danish Baptist Union. Open membership, however, has up to now been practised only in England on a large scale. What powers and motives have driven this increasing "open-ness" within the Baptist movement, and how should this development be judged and theologically understood?

Representatives of traditional "closed" Baptist practise undoubtedly regard the present development as treachery against the Baptist cause in that "open" Baptists are yielding to the pressure of surrounding, paedobaptist churches. But this development can also be interpreted in a positive way. By personal experience more and more Baptists have recognized their fellow-Christians in spite of the fact that the latter have not received believers' baptism. The desire to manifest fellowship with these brethren in faith at the Lord's table did not emanate from sentimental sympathy but is rooted in the centre of the New Testament: the fellowship already existing in the Word and in prayer strives to manifest itself in the breaking of bread as well (*Acts* ii. 42). In the same way an increasing readiness can be observed among Baptists to recognize other denominations who preach the gospel and celebrate the holy supper as partakers of the communion of saints and thereby as Christian churches and members in the body of Christ. But as they do not have baptism, in spite of the fact that they believe that they have it in the form of infant baptism, the Baptist recognition cannot be an absolute one. With reference to the Toronto statement made by the World Council of Churches in 1950, it can be expressed like this: a church composed of unbaptized but believing members cannot be looked upon as a church "in the true and full sense of the word," but yet as a church with reservation. Certain English Baptists

declare that the reason why the greatest part of Christianity has lost baptism is disobedience to divine revelation. This disobedience cannot be defended but it can be understood with reference to the fact that as early as in the time of the ancient Church the original meaning of baptism was obscured by outside influences. The introduction of infant baptism is the definite proof of the fact that both the understanding of the meaning of baptism and baptism itself, were lost. But in his long-suffering God has forbearance with human disobedience and he blesses churches too, which do not have baptism. If God "recognizes" such churches, it is a matter of course that also a church which thinks that it has preserved New Testament baptism does the same.

By this it has also been suggested that a Christian church is conceivable without baptism but not without faith. Faith alone can "bear" the Church; baptism alone cannot. Faith is more essential for the Church than baptism. Thus the present divided Church situation which was unknown to the New Testament has necessitated a reduced description of the Christian Church: "the fellowship of those believing and baptized" has become only "the fellowship of believers." Thereby a remarkable thing has occurred, in that Baptists, who in the course of history have endured martyrdom fearlessly for the sake of believers' baptism, have yet not seldom depreciated the importance of baptism to such a degree that they sometimes almost lost the understanding of their responsibility and the New Testament meaning of baptism. Baptism has often been regarded only as an act of confession and of obedience. This change of accent has especially been favoured in the Anglo-American climate with its strong spiritualistic element which is shown most consistently in the Quaker movement.

In spite of the weak understanding of the meaning of baptism it is, however, characteristic of this type of Baptists that they refuse to practise any other form of baptism than believers' baptism. In Baptist churches practising open membership, only believers are baptized, and these churches thus consist of both baptized and unbaptized members. The latter, however, are often baptized in course of time. Yet it could be asked what baptism means to a believer who already enjoys membership in the church. Baptism has then lost its New Testament connection with regeneration, and no other course is open to us but to interpret baptism exclusively as an act of confession and confirmation.

The Baptists largely adhering to the conception now described do not regard infant baptism as a Christian baptism, and therefore, according to their understanding it is not a matter of rebaptism when a person is baptized who has already received infant baptism. They do not wish to practise any form of proselytism. Open mem-

bership and the (limited) acknowledgement of other churches as Christian Churches include the respect for the Church membership and Christian faith of their members. If any of them by believers' baptism join the Baptist fellowship this can, as a matter of principle, be regarded as a result of the indwelling power of the Baptist witness. Nobody must be forced to accept baptism. That would mean violating the fundamental Baptist principle of everybody's inalienable right to respect for his conviction and to a free position in religious matters.

3. "Yes" and "No" to Infant Baptism. Ecumenical Intercommunion

Against the second Baptist alternative now described, certain objections can be raised. Is it consistent with Baptist respect for individual conviction of faith to declare every person baptized as an infant unbaptized, even though he himself confesses himself baptized and thanks God for his infant baptism? Further, the reduced Church conception which was a consequence of the second alternative can scarcely be derived from the New Testament. In the introductory chapters it was shown that a New Testament Church is inconceivable without baptism. If we abandon baptism as a necessary sign of a Christian Church, every group of believers in Christ can claim to be a Christian Church. Perhaps somebody will raise the objection that a Christian fellowship celebrating the Lord's Supper is a Church. But how can the Lord's Supper be necessary for the existence of a Christian Church any more than baptism?

It is thus a serious matter both to declare every infant baptism to be a "no baptism" and to speak of Christian Churches without baptism. Is the standpoint thus expressed the only Baptist alternative, if we are not prepared to accept the closed Baptist conception? What follows is an attempt to set out a "third position" which overcomes the difficulties inherent in the second alternative. It has as its background a religious environment where baptism and a sacramental interpretation of Christianity play a more important part than they traditionally have done in the main countries of the Baptist movement, England and America. In a Lutheran country, for instance, the Baptist churches are forced to proclaim their message and motivate their existence from other points of view, and thus other sides of New Testament baptismal theology have the chance to appear to advantage apart from those which Baptists have borne in mind up to now. Like the second alternative, the third position means an affirmation of intercommunion across church boundaries and recognizes other churches as Christian churches and it is inspired similarly by the conviction that the

Baptist message of baptism and the Church is still an urgent and undeniable responsibility.

The Mode and Time of Baptism.—In the New Testament baptism is described as a burial and resurrection together with Christ into a new life, and this event has its counterpart in the external form of baptism. Only baptism by immersion is the mode of baptism which actually expresses the deepest contents of baptism in the same way as the bread, which is broken and the common cup speak a language, which wafers and individual cups are not able to speak. In the Orthodox Church baptism by immersion (in the form of infant baptism) has been preserved, while on the other hand the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and the first generation of Baptists in England usually baptized by sprinkling. If a Baptist denies baptism by sprinkling as a Christian baptism this will mean that thereby he will declare that his spiritual forefathers were unbaptized. The mode of baptism cannot be decisive on the validity of baptism even though baptism by sprinkling is a corrupt baptism compared to baptism by immersion. On the other side the procedure of immersion is not enough to warrant the New Testament character of baptism. The time of administration of baptism is also of great importance. The right time for receiving baptism is when man has been hit by the words of the law and brought to a knowledge of sin and a confession of sin and accepts the message of the gospel about remission of sin and about faith. Then regeneration in baptism through faith can take place. This sometimes happens at a very early age, and in such cases it is meaningless to speak of "adult" baptism, an expression that is unsuitable and misleading from every point of view and therefore should be avoided. But at the same time a warning should be given against too early Baptist baptisms as well, for they often prove to be premature.

Is Infant Baptism a Christian Baptism? The first condition requisite for a person to be regarded as baptized is that the baptismal formula ("in the name of the triune God/or of Christ") has been pronounced over him and that water has been used. With this event Christ has associated the promise of His presence unto the end of time. This is the *objective* side of baptism, which is an instrument for God's dealing with man. But if baptism should be a true Christian baptism, there must be a *subjective* side as well. Just as a promise must be believed in to become effectual and full of blessing *to me*, baptism must be received in faith. In baptism the objective, God's dealing, and the subjective man's reception coalesce into an indissoluble unit, by which man is made a member of the Church, the body of Christ. As distinguished from the proclaimed word baptism is a non-recurrent event, which must be experienced in faith. The more baptism and faith are separated

in time and experience, the more baptism loses its New Testament meaning; it becomes "an unclear baptism" (Karl Barth). This is true of the believers who long postpone their baptism, and it is increasingly true of infant baptism and of the baptism of older people who had no faith at the time of their baptism. But is the objective side of baptism wholly lost in this "unclear" baptism? Is infant baptism a non-baptism? To this question no unambiguous and definite answer can be given. How far does God's forbearance with human misuse of divine ordinances reach? Does God use infant baptism as a means of building His Church in the world in spite of the fact that, according to Baptist conviction, it means a corruption of what baptism originally was meant to be? In the last resort the question of the "validity" or "nullity" of baptism must be left unanswered—for we know in part. But from an empirical point of view something can be said of the value of infant baptism.

Two Kinds of Infant Baptism. One type of infant baptism is administered in the presence of believing parents and godparents, who promise solemnly to bring up the baptized child in Christian faith and remind it of its baptism. This promise is fulfilled, and the baptized child is brought up to receive its baptism in faith. The objective contents of baptism are continually actualized for the baptized person until he himself can believe in his baptism and on confession of his faith in Christ can be received in "full membership" with the Church or until the baptized person after due instruction "is confirmed" in his Christian faith and thus is allowed to receive Holy Communion and enjoy full fellowship in the Church. Infant baptism acts here quite obviously as a church-building factor. People baptized as children believe that God dealt with them in baptism. Within the life-sphere of their church they have grown to faith and spiritual maturity, and they are now partaking in its service and its Holy Communion. In this case both the objective element and the subjective one are to be found, even though according to Baptist doctrine it is not the case of a New Testament baptism. Is it yet possible for Baptists to acknowledge such an "unclear" baptism as a Christian baptism in any sense? If a man who has received infant baptism believes that he is baptized and says before God and his Word that he knows this for certain, who am I to deny this? Would that not mean intervening in the ministry of God and presuming to judge another person's conscience? From a human point of view such a man could be regarded and treated as baptized, while the question of final veracity is left open. On the same grounds a church which practises infant baptism in faith and under responsibility could be given a limited acknowledgement as a Christian Church. It would thus be possible for Baptists to celebrate Holy Communion with such a church and its members on the

basis of faith *and* baptism, and it would not be necessary to give up the Baptist principle of baptism as a pre-requisite for Holy Communion. The conditions necessary for ecumenical co-operation with paedo-baptist churches would thus be created, although in a different way from the second alternative above, according to which only the church which baptizes infants but not its baptism is the object of a conditional acknowledgement.

But there is a different type of infant baptism as well, to which a "no" must be said quite frankly from the Baptist side. The Church conception must be rejected that emanates from an indiscriminate infant baptism quite independent of the fact whether the person being baptized receives faith and accepts grace or not. The consequences are obviously absurd when, as in the case of the Northern European countries, up to 95 per cent. of the population are baptized at a tender age and consequently should be regarded as Church members and members of the body of Christ. From this conception it could be argued that all non-Lutheran activity among these 95 per cent. of the population would be proselytism. Here is a caricature of the New Testament conception and practise of baptism and the Church. It is, from a Baptist point of view, important that a baptismal practise should be rejected, which means that a holy act is degraded to a half superstitious popular custom or a name-giving ceremony devoid of religious significance without any consequences for either the godparents or the child itself.

The majority of infant baptisms are, regrettably, of this type rather than the other described above. They are performed without accompanying education in the Christian faith, and they consequently become empty and meaningless. In 1 *Corinthians* xi: 27-29, Paul describes an unworthy celebration of the Lord's Supper, the outcome of which is that man "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." Analogically we could speak of "baptism to damnation". When it is the case of the misuse of baptism in that infant baptism where the rite is transferred from the sphere of faith and is secularized, there can be no question of the damnation of the young children who are baptized but of the church which thus deprives a divine ordinance of its sublimity and meaning.

Such a baptist 'yes' and 'no' to infant baptism means a double attitude towards paedo-baptist churches. On the one hand, to say 'yes' means a conditional acknowledgement of them and their baptism to the extent that, in the first type of infant baptism described, baptism stands at the beginning of a process of engrafting the individual into the fellowship of the Church. Under such circumstances ecumenical co-operation and intercommunion become possible. Baptism and church membership are mutually respected and proselytism is out of the question. On the other

hand, a Baptist 'no' to infant baptism does not mean that paedobaptist churches are denied their character as Christian churches, nor that their infant baptism is wholly denied as baptism. But it means that a reformation is thought necessary by which baptism is restored to its right place in the life of the Church and the individual. This reformation takes the form of baptism of people who come to faith outside a church fellowship where they were once baptized as children. Here it is not a matter of proselytism but of mission among people who are strangers to the Christian faith and tradition in spite of the fact that they are both baptized and confirmed. But how should we act if a man, baptized as an infant, who grew up as a believer, wishes to become a member of a Baptist church? Should he, at his own request, be re-baptized, or should he be granted membership without further baptism? If he is baptized again the new baptism neither gets its place at the beginning of the new life nor does it indicate entry to the Christian Church, for he already shares both. If, on the other hand, he is granted church membership without a new baptism the Baptist witness is weakened and the Baptist call to the reformation of the Church is undermined. If we, therefore, in spite of all, recommend re-baptism in such a case, this is not done lightly, for we recognize that this action will be regarded as a denial of an infant baptism which led on to faith.

This painful doubleness will characterize the Baptist churches as long as infant baptism is being practised within Christendom. The only radical solution of the problem of re-baptism, intercommunion and proselytism is that the practise of infant baptism comes to an end. Until this happens, an "open" Baptist Church is forced to remain in the double attitude in which it is now, whether it corresponds to the second alternative described above or to the third. The doubleness means on one hand that we recognize as the Church of Christ all those who believe in Christ and have the fellowship of life with him (as unbaptized or as baptized with an "unclear" baptism) and that in every way we try to manifest the fellowship of the saints in service and work. On the other hand that Baptist Churches regard it as the task given to them by God to try to realize the New Testament order of baptism and the Church in the midst of a complicated Church situation. According to their view faith and baptism belong indissolubly together both in the life of the Church and the individual. All those who by faith live in Christ are already one body in him. This spiritual reality strives by its inherent nature to take an outer visible form, and until this has happened it is incomplete. In this procedure baptism has an indispensable task to fulfil, and Baptists regard it as their calling, in preaching and practice, to present the Church, the body of

Christ, as a visible reality in the life of mankind between Christ's resurrection and return.

Finally, a word should also be said about the meaning of the third stand-point for the inner life of Baptist Churches as for faith, baptism and re-baptism. According to the thought presented above which regards baptism as functioning "to damnation" if it is not administered according to the New Testament, the act of baptism can never be without effects. It serves either to the edifying of the Church of Christ if it is rightly administered, or to its destruction and secularization, if it is misused. Both these possibilities are open to Baptists as well. If it becomes evident that a man has demanded and received the Baptist baptism without faith and with false motives, the necessity of re-baptism must be seriously considered if he comes to true repentance and faith. But it is still more important to stress the meaning of baptism for those who received it in faith and with an open mind. If such a man gets into doubts as to his relationship to God, the task of baptism is to serve as a help and a support of faith: in baptism God acted with me and if I am faithless, He faithfully holds to his Word, the Word pronounced over me in baptism. If the disquieting question arises, "Did I have the right faith at the moment of baptism," it is extremely important for a correct education to be given about faith so that the latter is not conceived as a human achievement necessary as a pre-requisite for God's acting. First and foremost the doubter should be directed towards God and His many promises in the Bible which are connected with baptism. Thus the fact that I was baptized in Christ's name can be a permanent source of new power and blessing, and baptism becomes a true "means of grace". On this view there can be no question of rebaptizing a backslider when he comes to faith again. If he once received baptism in faith it can never be repeated. If he goes away, it will be a permanent judgement and reminder of what he lost. If he returns, he is reinstated to membership of the Family of God which he once gained by faith and baptism.

Baptism is a holy and deeply significant ordinance which was entrusted to the Church to be administered with great earnestness and joy. A Baptist church too, must be careful not to change baptism through misuse and bring judgement on itself. Such judgement is the 'negative' effect of baptism. But its positive and essential effect and meaning is to be a way of the gracious God to man and man's way to God and His Church; a way which he has to walk with faith in Christ and obedience to His Word.

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