

Water Baptism in Jesus' Name: From Heaven or from Men?

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It has long been the tendency of some to minimize the importance of water baptism. Casting it as a threat to salvation by grace through faith, they have relegated baptism to the status of only a symbolic gesture. The Bible is not ambiguous with regard to baptism. However, the theology of many is often at odds with the Scriptures. Consequently, people are predisposed to contort biblical teachings regarding baptism in order to force harmony between the Scriptures and their own theological views. As a result, scriptural teachings about water baptism have been besieged by a most unlikely foe. Indeed, we have seen nothing short of what could be described as a *Christian* assault on *Christian* baptism.

Presently there is a teaching among some that baptism in water is not needful at all — nor even desirable.¹ In that view, it is believed that Christian water baptism was an issue of Moses' law or simply a church tradition. It is often set in the light of "ritual," "ceremony," or "custom." It has even been proposed that the practice of water baptism largely serves the cause of Satan in his efforts to "obscure the truth from people and keep them in bondage."² The chief problem with all such ideas is that they are *not* what was said about Christian water baptism by the writers of the Scriptures.

This is a subject of no small consequence. As we will see, it is not possible to be faithful to the kingdom message while setting aside baptism in water or otherwise diminishing its significance. The purpose of this article is to review the scriptural facts regarding Christian water baptism and to answer some of the key arguments that have been unfortunately set against it.

¹ J.A. Lynn, *What is True Baptism?* Indianapolis: Christian Educational Services, 2002. While Mr. Lynn's well-intended book represents that view, this article is not a critique of his book. Also, while his work is cited in this article, it is not to be understood that all positions noted in opposition to water baptism necessarily represent his views.

² *Ibid.*, 37.

Fact No. 1. Water baptism is a part of true kingdom preaching.

In the New Testament, water baptism was an intrinsic part of the kingdom message. We should not overlook the obvious — water baptism was not only received by those aspiring to the kingdom but also *preached* by the kingdom messengers. An excellent example of this “preaching of baptism” is found in the ministry of John (Mk. 1:4, Lk. 3:3). The baptism he preached was a very specific baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of God. This is seen again in the kingdom preaching of Philip in the city of Samaria. In Acts 8:12 Luke relates that when people “believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized [Gk. imperf. “were being baptized”], both men and women.”³

If a ministry of the kingdom of God fails to preach water baptism, it cannot say its message is the same as that of the preachers in the New Testament. Any ministry today seeking to herald the kingdom without preaching water baptism has changed the terms of the reception of the kingdom message. More than that, it has changed the message itself.

Fact No. 2. God was doing something new in Israel.

The idea has been advanced that John’s baptism was an aspect of the law of Moses.⁴ However, that is simply untenable. No Scripture ever states that John’s baptism was an activity of the law. Nor do the Scriptures equate it to any other immersion in water.

It is the case that there were various washings or ablutions associated with Moses’ law.⁵ It also appears that there was an immersion associated with becoming a proselyte. John’s baptism, however, was understood to be unique by the people of his day. This is made clear by the fact that there were many pools in the city of Jerusalem in which ceremonial washings might take place. Yet people were making the journey out to places like the river Jordan to receive the baptism of John. Unlike ablutions of the law, John’s baptism was not related to the washing or cleansing of the body but rather directly related to repentance and forgiveness of sins (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:4).

Unlike typical ablutions of the law, John’s baptism was not an act to be repeated at various times. Rather, it was a turning point in the lives of people in

³ Unless otherwise noted, scriptural quotations are from the NRSV.

⁴ Lynn, 8.

⁵ The “dispute” between some of John’s disciples with a certain Jew over purifying (John 3:25) may have resulted from his confusing John’s baptism with ablutions of the law and challenging John’s authority in the matter. Whatever the case, the passage provides no support to the idea that John was conducting ablutions in accordance with the law of Moses.

preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of God. Ablutions and the immersions of proselytes were most often self-immersions whereas John's unique baptism was always *received* by people — it was never something that they themselves did.⁶ There was a baptizer and the baptizer got wet.

With all of this in mind, it is most important to recognize that it was God who sent John to preach baptism in water (Luke 3:2-3). Jesus presses this point with the chief priests and elders in Matthew 21:24-27. It was God who determined that people should receive a baptism in water to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. One could not say he had received the word of God John preached with regard to the kingdom and reject the baptism he preached as part of that message. Likewise, no one could say he had repented when he rejected John's baptism of repentance.

A book written in disfavor of water baptism (previously cited)⁷ fails to point out that John's baptism was unique and that it originated directly from God. Moses had long been dead when the voice of the one crying in the wilderness was heard (Matt. 3:1-3). Not everything that occurred during the term of Moses' law was of his law. The direction to John to preach the kingdom of God was not given to him by Moses — neither was the unique baptism that he preached. Receiving John's baptism was incumbent upon the people of the day and could not be accomplished by any other immersion. God was truly doing something new in Israel.

Fact No. 3. The perfecter of our faith showed by example the importance of such a baptism.

Jesus went to no small trouble to receive water baptism. He left his home in Galilee and made his way to the river Jordan where John was baptizing (Matt. 3:13). By so doing, he set an example that all should receive such a water baptism. Jesus was singular in that he did not need to repent nor to receive forgiveness of sins (1 Pet. 2:22). These facts, taken with the example he gave, point to how important it was to Jesus that others receive such a baptism.

It has been asserted that Jesus was baptized because the law of Moses was still pertinent to him.⁸ However, as we saw above, John's baptism was not prescribed by the law of Moses. To receive the baptism of John was to fulfill the righteousness of God who sent John to baptize (Luke 7:29-30).

Jesus preceded his preaching of the kingdom by first receiving baptism in water. God was pleased with him and chose this occasion to say so (Mark 1:9-11). Anyone today who has not or will not repent and receive a baptism in water

⁶ The use of the passive with regard to baptism in the New Testament is obvious.

⁷ Lynn.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

for the forgiveness of sins cannot truthfully say that he has followed the example so carefully set by our Lord.

Fact No. 4. Jesus' ministry was characterized by a wonderful water baptism.

People were baptized in great numbers under Jesus' personal ministry. As noted above, Jesus gave credence to the baptism of John as being from heaven. John also gave testimony to the baptism under Jesus' ministry as being given to Jesus from heaven (John 3:26-28). No one today can say that his ministry is truly like that of Jesus when water baptism is not an important aspect of that ministry.

Jesus did not personally baptize others. Some have thought that this was because he was to be the baptizer with holy spirit. Again, perhaps his concern was the same as Paul's in writing to the Corinthians, that some might lay claim to special discipleship due to *who* baptized them.⁹ Regardless, the fact is that baptism was received by people under the ministry of Jesus to the point that he was said to have baptized more people than John (John 4:1).

Many Christians today are hardly aware of the baptism in water that was such an important aspect of the ministry of our Lord. Perhaps the unfortunate disposition to diminish water baptism has left some uncomfortable with the idea of preaching about this amazing baptism by Jesus. The aforementioned book in opposition to water baptism follows this same pattern by not recognizing that the baptism under Jesus' ministry was distinct from John's and that it originated with God Himself. It also fails to point out the great extent of water baptism under Jesus' ministry. Indeed it is said that more people were baptized under his ministry than by John himself — a man who was known as “the baptizer.” It is clear that the greatest kingdom preacher of all time, Jesus, had a personal ministry which was characterized by baptism in water.

Fact No. 5. Water baptism was an essential aspect of kingdom preaching after Jesus was taken up into heaven.

The apostles preached repentance and a baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins subsequent to the Lord being taken up into heaven. It is important to recognize that they were preaching that baptism in the name of Jesus as the Messiah. No one could rightly claim he had accepted the word about Jesus of

⁹ It hardly seems needful to review the faultiness in the reasoning that turns Paul's point in 1 Cor. 1:13-17 from his not being sent “to baptize” into the notion that he is diminishing baptism itself. Paul, of course, never subscribes to the latter. This passage brings to bear the importance of being baptized in the name of Christ, while diminishing the importance of *who* baptizes one. Paul is only saying that under the circumstances of their “party spirit” he is glad he did not personally baptize very many of them, as they might use the fact that he baptized them to assert unique discipleship to Paul.

Nazareth being the Christ and reject the baptism in his name that was an essential part of that word.

In his message on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter is quite on point. After he preached the word regarding Jesus, including that God has “made him both Lord and Messiah” (vv. 22-36), many of those gathered asked the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” (v. 37). Peter as key spokesman directs the people to repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins. However, according to Peter, such forgiveness is predicated upon the baptism being “in the name of Jesus Christ” (v. 38).

It has been suggested that water baptism would not be applicable once holy spirit had been given. However, that was never taught by John, Jesus nor any of the apostles. And, as we have seen, the Scriptures demonstrate precisely the opposite. There was in fact a great baptism in water in Jesus' name that was preached in the heralding of the kingdom after he was taken up and after he sent holy spirit to his disciples. On the day of Pentecost, we find the apostles now preaching the promise of holy spirit to a people expected to receive a baptism in water in the name of Jesus as the Messiah — giver of that spirit.

To suggest that Christ never intended the disciples to baptize in water following his being taken up into heaven is inconceivable. Again, no Scripture says that. If the apostles were in error on this matter, then Jesus failed in monumental fashion to prepare his messengers to carry forward the kingdom message (Acts 1:1-3; Matt. 28:20). If we cannot trust the word of the apostles regarding water baptism as recorded in Acts 2:37-41, how shall we then be justified in trusting the balance of their message?

It is upon the preaching that Jesus has been made Lord and Christ that repentance and water baptism in his name is prescribed. It is upon prescription of that baptism that the promise of holy spirit is indicated. How shall we then in any sense oppose that which the Scriptures order? To depart from Peter's command regarding water baptism in Jesus' name is to depart from the word of God. We must take care not to oppose or otherwise diminish this baptism lest we be found fighting against God.

We see in the second chapter of Acts the inception of that preaching of the kingdom which followed Christ being taken up and holy spirit being given. That preaching was inaugurated with thousands receiving water baptism in Jesus' name. No one today can say that he is being faithful to the kingdom message preached by the apostles if he is not preaching that same water baptism.

Fact No. 6. There is now only one baptism in water that is true to Jesus Christ.

Repentance and water baptism on the occasion recorded in Acts 2:38 are directed by Peter to “every one of you.” Thousands of Jews and proselytes were assembled that day (Acts 2:10). Among them would have been people who had

observed ablutions of the law. Others may have been immersed when becoming proselytes. Some may have been baptized under John's baptism. Peter is emphatic in saying "every one of you." They were now all to receive this greater baptism in water in the name of Jesus as the Messiah.

The primacy of water baptism in the name of Jesus is again well illustrated by the case of some early believers in the city of Ephesus. There we have a record of certain persons having been baptized under John's baptism who were then immersed under Paul's ministry in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). Paul later writes to the church at Ephesus the wonderful affirmation that in a world of varied water "baptisms" there is for the church "only one Lord, one faith and one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

It has been indicated by some that the baptism intended by Paul in Ephesians 4:5 is actually baptism in spirit to the exclusion of water baptism in the name of Jesus.¹⁰ It has been thought that Paul, by the time of his writing to the Ephesians, had received a revelation that baptism in water was not relevant. However, this "revelation" must be viewed as "The revelation that never was." Clearly, Paul never speaks of having had such a revelation.

Baptism in water was widely known to the people of New Testament times. As a result, the writers of the Scriptures frequently referred to water baptism by the word "baptism" alone. This was the commonly understood and customary reference of the word. Luke, Paul and others regularly use this convention. For example, Luke's pattern in Acts of using the word "baptism" to refer to immersion in water shows his confidence that the reader will readily understand "water" when he uses the word "baptism" alone (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-13; 9:18, etc.).

This then allows us to test the peculiar idea forwarded by some that in Acts 19:5 Luke suddenly uses the word "baptism" to refer to spirit exclusive of water! That idea fails in that it flies in the face of overwhelming context to the contrary. It is unconvincing to argue that the word "baptism" somehow takes on a different reference by Luke in Acts 19:5 than it had just previously in Acts 16:33 and afterwards in Acts 22:16. This is also made clear when we note that Luke indicates that "many" people in the city of Corinth had received water baptism under Paul's ministry just prior to his coming to Ephesus (Acts 18:1, 7-8). We see then that Acts 19:1-5 provides a decisive contrast between the baptism that John preached and the greater water baptism in Jesus' name which was preached by Paul and the other apostles.

Luke never indicates to his reader that at some juncture he is suddenly to understand that the word "baptism" is now being used to refer to spirit to the very exclusion of water! Nor does he ever tell Theophilus that water baptism has been supplanted or made obsolete by the coming of the spirit. Likewise, Paul never

¹⁰ Lynn, 18-19.

speaks of a shift from the normal use of the word “baptism” in reference to water. Such a shift would have been sharp and would have certainly required clarification for his readers. Christians over time have rightly assumed the word “baptism” normally refers to immersion in water as that is how it is commonly used in the Bible.¹¹

The immersions of the law and of proselytes are no longer relative and the baptism of John has given way to the greater baptism in the name of Jesus as the Christ. Now, the only baptism in water true to those anticipating the coming kingdom is that which is in the name of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

Fact No. 7. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ brings us into Christ.

Why would we imagine that a baptism in water in the name of Jesus the Messiah would not effect great things? In the Scriptures, the name of a person is himself or his character.¹² It stands for all the person is or represents. When people received baptism in water in the name of Jesus, it was about more than a formula of words being spoken. They were, in fact, by faith immersed into the person of Christ.

We see the concept of people being baptized into Christ in Acts 19:5. There, Paul baptized people in water into the name of the Lord Jesus. The phrase “into [Greek *eis*] the name of the Lord Jesus” implies immersion into all that the person of Jesus Christ is and all that he represents for us.¹³ Hence, they were baptized into Christ. Paul uses language in the same way in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:13-15). Once again, we find the concept of being immersed into (*eis*) the name of a person, indicating a baptism into relationship with *that person*. It is significant that in this passage Paul is by implication referencing *water baptism* “into” the name (i.e. person) of Jesus Christ. In his renowned Greek-English lexicon, Walter Bauer directs us to this same thought regarding water baptism into the name of Jesus:

Through baptism *eis to onoma*, the one who is baptized becomes the possession of and comes under the protection of the one whose name he

¹¹ It should also be noted that the words *baptismos/baptizo* in their various forms occur over 100 times in the New Testament. In the vast majority of those cases the reference is to water. This forms a pattern of normal use that is found throughout the New Testament. To disregard that pattern is unjustified and works mischief with the intent of the writers.

¹² Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible, Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Item #44.

¹³ The aforementioned book by Mr. Lynn rightly recognizes the import of the phrase “into the name of the Lord Jesus” in Acts 19:5. However, it inappropriately assumes that baptism in spirit as opposed to water must therefore be intended.

bears; he is under the control of the effective power of the name and the One who bears the name, i.e., he is dedicated to them.¹⁴

Water baptism in the name of Jesus clearly brings one into Christ. That fact discredits the idea that as water is a physical substance and in baptism touches only the body then the water baptism preached by the apostles could not effect the cleansing of the conscience.¹⁵ This is nowhere stated in the Scriptures. How could a water baptism that God recognizes as bringing a person into relationship with Christ not cleanse the conscience?

Note again that Peter in Acts 2:38 prescribes water baptism in the name of Jesus “so that your sins may be forgiven.” The forgiveness of one’s sins would most certainly cleanse the conscience! Peter also addresses the matter of conscience quite directly in the third chapter of I Peter. He was very familiar with ablutions of the law and ceremonial washings of the body. He makes clear, however, that the water baptism that he preached was *not* about ceremony or cleansing of the body. Rather, that baptism was in itself “*an appeal to God for a good conscience* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (v. 21).

Paul brings us to no less a conclusion regarding the cleansing of the conscience. In Acts 22 he effectively preaches water baptism in the name of the Lord in reciting the occasion when he himself received baptism in water (v. 16). In that passage, he repeats the words of Ananias: “Be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.” How could a washing away of Paul’s sins in water baptism not cleanse his conscience? This then also brings to light the matter of *when* Paul’s sins were forgiven. If Paul’s sins were forgiven prior to his being baptized as the theology of some demands, then why would he need to wash away his sins by receiving baptism while calling on the name of the Lord? Paul’s own baptism in water then agrees perfectly with a right understanding of his teachings regarding water baptism in the church epistles.

How could a water baptism in the name of Christ ever become irrelevant to Christians? Our New Testament was written by preachers of the kingdom who were truly filled with holy spirit. Those same kingdom preachers proclaimed a mighty water baptism in the name of Jesus as the Messiah. That water baptism, if the Scriptures are to be believed, saw the immersion of people into Christ.

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and adapted by Arndt and Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1957, 575. It is interesting to note that if the phrase “in the name of” carries the meaning “by the authority of” as some have indicated, then on the day of Pentecost Peter is commanding water baptism “in the name of,” i.e. “*by the authority of*” Jesus Christ! (Acts 2:38).

¹⁵ Lynn, 16.

Fact No. 8. Receiving water baptism in faith makes us complete in Christ.

How shall anyone be complete before he is in Christ? How shall anyone be deficient after he is in Christ? The one water baptism into Jesus Christ is marvelously sufficient. Paul tells the Colossians they are “complete” or “made full” in Christ (2:10). He then reminds those same Colossians that it was “*when* [they] were buried with him in baptism” that they were “*also* raised with him through faith in the power of God” (2:12).

It has been argued that it is faith as opposed to baptism which of necessity would bring people into relationship with Christ. However, this is a false dichotomy. Rather, Paul sets water baptism in Jesus’ name as the occasion of that faith. Note again that it was the faith of the Colossians in the power of God *at the time of their baptism* that made it effectual, and it was the crucial faith that God raised Jesus from the dead (2:12).¹⁶

Paul addresses that same faith in Romans 10:9. He tells the Christians at Rome “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” People today often isolate Paul’s statements in this passage from a full view of his own experience, ministry, and writings regarding faith and water baptism into Christ. In reality we need look no further than this same letter to the Romans to find him declaring that they had indeed been baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). Hence, the people in the Bible who were confessing with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in their hearts that God raised him from the dead were a people who were receiving water baptism into Christ.

Paul speaks decisively to this matter in writing to the people at Galatia. There he reminds them that “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, *for* all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (3:26-27, NIV). I have no right to say that I embrace Paul’s preaching regarding faith in passages like Romans 10:9 and disregard or minimize his preaching concerning that faith and water baptism in the name of Jesus as the Messiah.

The other apostles had been instructed and commissioned by the same Lord as Paul. In Mark 16:16 we see Jesus presenting to the apostles the concept of water baptism and faith leading to salvation. Hence, we find the essential

¹⁶ Like Paul, Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism* saw no conflict between his teaching of salvation by grace through faith and water baptism for the forgiveness of sins. In the catechism, the great reformer answers the question “What is baptism?” with “Baptism is not simple water only, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s word.” To the question “What does baptism give or profit?” he answers, “It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe, as the words and promise of God declare” (*Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*, 1529 AD, Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 16).

relationship between faith and water baptism not only in Paul's ministry but also in that of the apostles generally.

This is evident in Acts 2, where the apostles taught that people were to believe the message of God's work in Christ and that God raised him from the dead (vv. 22-24). Those same people were also to repent and receive a water baptism in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (vv. 37-38). Repenting and receiving baptism in faith was also the receiving of *the faith*. To reject this repentance and baptism was to reject the word of God about Jesus. People could not say they had believed the report of the word of God regarding His Christ, and turn away when the same word brought them to water baptism in acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as that Christ.

Another Baptism?

There has been the development of a variety of "baptisms" in the Christian world since New Testament times. Those baptisms have tended to vary from the "one baptism" of the apostles in form, purpose, and faith. How much variance can there be before it should be said that one has "another baptism"? Again, what is the justification for varying at all? When we do, both people and truth are betrayed.

Any preaching of water baptism that excludes forgiveness of sins and being immersed into the person of Jesus produces a different baptism than the apostles preached. In the Scriptures, the people being baptized in Jesus' name were people who understood his coming kingdom, knew who he really was and had faith in the work of God in him. Upon what faith are people being baptized today?

In a series of distinguished lectures as well as in his exceptional book on baptism, G.R. Beasley-Murray challenges the many variances from the one baptism of the apostles. He particularly presses his fellow Baptists to reevaluate the critical relationship between saving faith and water baptism in the Scriptures. Beasley-Murray states: "Here is an aspect of baptism to which justice has not been done in the Church since its early days: baptism as a means of prayer for acceptance with God and for full salvation from God, an 'instrument of surrender.'" He goes on to say: "The loss of this element in baptism is grievous and it needs to be regained if baptism is to mean to the modern Church what it did to the earliest Church."¹⁷

Evangelicals have generally recognized as obvious that certain passages in the epistles (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21, etc.) refer to baptism in water. However, many of those same evangelicals are then left with overall

¹⁷ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, 102. These and other similar comments were made by Dr. Beasley-Murray in lectures at four Southern Baptist seminaries in the United States as well as in various other lectures in Europe.

unsatisfactory and even embarrassing exegesis in their quest to somehow make those verses harmonize with their own views regarding salvation. Ultimately, they provide amazing exegetical gymnastics in their attempts to show that scriptural statements such as “baptized into Christ” and “baptism saves us,” etc. simply do not mean what they say. Thoughtful people have rightly had difficulty accepting these painful efforts to “explain away” the obvious with regard to these passages.

The approach of those now indicating that water baptism is not needful at all or even desirable takes a different tack. They seek to resolve inconsistencies between their beliefs about salvation and the Scriptures regarding water baptism by conjecturing that the passages in question refer to spirit exclusive of water. However, as this article has clearly shown, that strategy also fails. What the Scriptures say about water baptism in Jesus' name thunderously disallows that approach. There is of course an alternative available to all — everyone could embrace the truth about water baptism in the name of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

Conclusion

It is an odd thing that Christians would in the name of Christ distance themselves from a baptism in his name. It is time for us to ask ourselves the question, “Is water baptism in Jesus' name from heaven or from men?” If from men, then indeed we should allow it no place in our preaching of the kingdom message. On the other hand, if it is from God then who can rightly claim to be a true minister of the word of the kingdom and not preach this baptism in the name of its king?

Rather than proposing that the apostles for so many years erred regarding water baptism, would it not be more reasonable to conclude that it is people today who err in this matter? The apostles never speak of receiving a revelation that water baptism was not relevant. Rather than hypothesizing such a revelation, is it not better to conclude that it is people now who err by proposing that the apostles did receive one?

Who will dare to say that even one writer of the New Testament was not baptized in water? Again, people who oppose or diminish water baptism in Jesus' name do so without the benefit of a single Scripture that characterizes it in a diminishing or negative light. They also do so in the face of a host of Scriptures which bring to us this wonderful water baptism in the name of our Lord.

It is unreasonable to say that water baptism is not of God and then in accommodation say that God has not forbidden it. Neither is it sufficient to say that it is “permissible” or “acceptable” for people to be baptized in water or that people should be baptized just to “play it safe.” The Scriptures do not allow such options. If the Scriptures are to be our guide, they present us with words in regard to water baptism like “every one of you,” “the same day,” “baptized without

delay” and “why do you delay? Get up, be baptized,” etc. Such words convey a clear sense of urgency. Does that same sense of urgency represent our attitude today about water baptism? If not, why have we changed?

Further, we simply cannot allow a baptism in water but at the same time disallow its significance as seen in the Scriptures. True baptism is not whatever we say it is; it is whatever God says it is. It is the Scriptures that provide us with words regarding water baptism like “in the name of Jesus Christ,” “for the forgiveness of sins,” “wash away your sins,” “believes and is baptized shall be saved,” etc. Such words are clear. The only question is, Will we believe them?¹⁸

As is the case with some other important issues, there has been a long history of unfortunate disputations over water baptism among Christians. Such disputations over baptism did not exist among Christians in the Scriptures. It is clear that they taught and believed in water baptism. They never changed in that belief. There was no contention, however, because they all believed in the same “one baptism.” All argument on the subject of baptism today can cease if people will simply embrace the one baptism into Christ that the apostles preached and the facts regarding that baptism.

It is a singularly great privilege to herald the kingdom message in our day. It is a great privilege to preach water baptism in the name of its king. When we do so we are in great company. We are in the company of those kingdom preachers who followed the Lord and gave their lives for his name. We are also in the company of those kingdom preachers today who with joy preach that same baptism. To be true to the proclamation of the coming kingdom, we must accurately proclaim this baptism as part of that message. We can hope to see nothing greater in our time than the preaching of the kingdom of God with

¹⁸ Many evangelicals can picture “coming forward — in faith,” “praying a sinner’s prayer — in faith,” “making a decision for Christ — in faith” or “confessing Christ — in faith” as the manner of receiving Christ. It is peculiar that some of those same evangelicals stringently oppose the thought of the first Christians — that water baptism in the name of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ “in faith” was the occasion of coming to be in Christ.

repentance and water baptism in Jesus' name of biblical character and proportions.