

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Let us observe in the third place, *the public profession which, Jesus requires of those who believe His Gospel*. He tells His apostles to "baptize" those whom they received as disciples.

It is very difficult to conceive when we read this last command of our Lord's, how men can avoid the conclusion that baptism is necessary, when it may be had. It seems impossible to explain the word that we have here of any but an outward ordinance to be administered to all who join His Church. That outward baptism is not absolutely necessary to salvation, the case of the penitent thief plainly shows: he went to paradise unbaptized. That outward baptism alone often confers no benefit, the case of Simon Magus plainly shows: although baptized he remained "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." (Acts 3:29.) But that baptism is a matter of entire indifference and need not be used at all, is an assertion which seems at variance with our Lord's words in this place.

The plain practical lesson of the words is the necessity of a public confession of faith in Christ. It is not enough to be a secret disciple: we must not be ashamed to let men see whose we are, and whom we serve. We must not behave as if we did not like to be thought Christians; but take up our cross, and confess our Master before the world. His words are very solemn: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38.)

Let us observe, in the fourth place, *the obedience which Jesus requires of all who profess themselves His disciples*. He bids the Apostles teach them to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded them. This is a searching expression. It shows the uselessness of a mere name and form of Christianity; it shows that they only are to be counted true Christians who live in a practical obedience to His word, and strive to do the things that He has commanded. The water of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper alone will save no man's soul. It profits nothing that we go to a place of worship and hear Christ's ministers, and approve of the Gospel, if our religion goes no further than this. What are our lives? What is our daily conduct at home and abroad? Is the Sermon on the Mount our rule and standard? Do we strive to copy Christ's example? Do we seek to do the things that He commanded? These are questions that must be answered in the affirmative if we would prove ourselves born again, and children of God. Obedience is the only proof of reality. "Faith without works is dead," being alone. (James 2:17, 20, 26.) "Ye are my friends," says Jesus, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14.)

J C Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, pp. 410-412.

Gisborne Presbyterian Charge

12 June 2016 — Baptism of William Barry Phillips

Sermon: "Baptism—a Family Occasion"

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-14; Colossians 2:6-23

Sermon Notes

Introduction: The birth of a child is a significant occasion for his or her parents; there are good reasons why childbirth is called 'labour' - but joy follows (cf. John 16:20-22).

The birth of a child is also a significant occasion for the child's extended family—and so in Christian families the baptism of a child is a family occasion. Baptism is also a family occasion for the congregation, for God is 'our Father'.

1. Entering God's family by the new birth

We enter our natural families in a natural way—but we enter God's family in a supernatural way; we enter our natural families by being born of our mothers, but we enter God's family by being born of God's Spirit; those people who receive Jesus are born of God (Jn 1:11-13).

Jesus told Nicodemus, Jewish religious teacher, that his religion and knowledge were not enough: to enter God's kingdom he must be born again (Jn 3:3). When Nicodemus didn't understand, Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5).

Some say 'water' means 'baptism' - but Jesus hadn't yet appointed Christian baptism, and 'born of water and the Spirit' (v. 5) is paralleled by 'born of the Spirit' (v. 6) - and so 'born of water and the Spirit' is simply another way of saying 'born of the Spirit'.

Jesus teaches that this birth of the Spirit gives us a spiritual washing that makes us fit to enter God's kingdom. God is holy, separate from sin and moral impurity; only people who are washed from their sins and moral defilement can enter his kingdom.

Although Nicodemus was a Jew, he needed this washing; by nature we too are morally and spiritually defiled and need washing; we may be religious, we may be virtuous, but before we can enter God's kingdom we must be washed by the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to be a Christian (Titus 3:3-7).

There is much that is mysterious about the birth of the Spirit; it is like the blowing of the wind (John 3:8). But two things are clear; firstly, the Spirit brings about this birth by the word of God (1 Peter 1:22-25); the living and abiding word of God is the gospel, the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus, the Saviour of sinners.

Secondly, we know this new birth has happened to us, that we have been born of the Spirit, when we believe the gospel and trust the Lord Jesus; God saved us by

the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5, 7f).

In the Bible, 'justified' is the opposite of 'condemned'; God justifies us not by changing us, but by forgiving our sins and declaring us righteous because of Christ's righteousness, which he imputes or reckons to us, and which we receive by faith, so that salvation is by grace through faith, not as a result of works (Ephesians 2:9-9).

2. Entering God's family by baptism

Our faith in Jesus, the Son of God who died for sinners, is evidence that we have been born of water and the Spirit; faith in Jesus brings us into a spiritual union with Jesus as our Head, and so believers should belong to a congregation of his church.

Trusting Jesus, we know we have been born of water and the Spirit; when we declare that faith before the congregation, they know we have been born of water and the Spirit—and because this washing of our inner person fits us for a place in his kingdom, admission into the membership of his church is by baptism with water as a sign and a seal that we have been born of water and the Spirit.

In baptism we say, 'I am a believer in the Lord Jesus; I have been born of water and the Spirit; I have received the washing that qualifies me to a place among God's holy people—and in baptism the people of God say to us, 'We believe you have been washed as Jesus said we must be; welcome into the fellowship of the saints.'

Why do we baptise infants? Because we believe the Bible teaches that the infant children of at least one believing parent are part of God's family, the church. The apostle Paul teaches that such children are holy (1 Cor 7:14), so they are entitled to the sign of God's covenant of salvation.

God covenanted with Abraham to be God to him and to his offspring after him, and gave him circumcision as a sign of that covenant for himself and every male of his household and every male child at the age of 8 days (Gen 17:1-14; Rom 4:11). Circumcision signified a cutting off of sin and evil to do what is right before God.

What circumcision was to Abraham and his family baptism is to us (Col 2:11; cf. Deut 10:16). Baptism also signifies separation from sin to a life of obedience to God, the 'putting of the body of flesh' through union with Christ; united to him by faith, we have died with him to sin and have been raised to a new life of righteousness.

As infant Israelites were circumcised as a sign of their separation from evil unto God, so we baptise the infant children of believers as a sign of their separation from evil unto God—but in their case baptism points to their need of the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, and their need to believe in Jesus.

If you have been baptised, have you been born of water and the Spirit? Is your hope of heaven faith in Jesus, Saviour of sinners? And if you have not been baptised, is it because you have not seen your need of him to be our Saviour? Believe in him (Jn 3:14-15) and then take your place in his church, and bring your children with you.

My Notes: