

Should a Baptist Church Recognize Alien Baptism?

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Dedicated to the memory of my Justice forefathers who for eleven generations since the Great Awakening in early America have been Baptists. Psalm 16:6

According to an article in the *Baptist Messenger* a few years ago the Park Road Southern Baptist Church of Charlotte, NC has voted that rebaptism by immersion will no longer be required for membership in their church. At about the same time three other churches withdrew from the same association over this matter. I know of a Baptist church in metropolitan Oklahoma City that recently received members of a Disciples of Christ church without baptizing them. Baptists have a term for such a practice. We call it recognizing alien immersion or alien baptism. To recognize alien baptism is to accept as a member of a Baptist church any person on the basis of the baptism which he received in a church of another denomination.

Today a generation of Baptists has arisen some of which have few qualms about recognizing alien baptism and many of which have evidently never even heard the term alien baptism. Should a Baptist church receive as members without baptizing them Presbyterians who were sprinkled as children? Should a Baptist church receive as members without baptizing them Lutherans who were sprinkled as a means of grace?

WHAT CONSTITUTES SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM?

Pendleton's *Church Manual* gives us a good concise biblical definition of baptism when it says that baptism is "The immersion in water by a proper administrator of a believer in Christ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is the divinely appointed symbol of our belief in the three great truths of the gospel; the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the divinely appointed ceremony of our profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism marks and identifies a person as belonging to Christ. Baptism also pictures the believer's own experience of being dead to sin, buried with Christ, and raised to walk in newness of life.

In order to understand what constitutes scriptural baptism we need to be aware that there are four scriptural requirements that must be met if baptism is to be valid. Scriptural baptism must involve the proper candidate. The proper candidate for baptism is a believer in Jesus Christ, a person who has already been saved. The scriptures tell us that belief in Christ for salvation always precedes baptism.

For example the people in Samaria who were converted under the ministry of Phillip the evangelist were baptized after they had believed. Acts 8:12 says "But when they believed Phillip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." The Ethiopian Eunuch whom Phillip led to Christ as they rode in the chariot together was not baptized until Phillip had first made sure that he was a believer in Christ. Acts 8:36-37 says "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Phillip said, If thou

believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Acts 16:30-33 tells that it was after he had been saved that the Phillipian jailor was baptized.

Since baptism is for believers, then infant baptism does not qualify as being valid baptism. A person must be old enough to believe before he is baptized. This is why we Baptists sometimes refer to believer’s baptism as adult baptism. Sometimes people who are considering joining a Baptist church will say. “I have already been baptized as a child and I see no need to repeat it.” But scriptural baptism excludes all infant baptisms because scriptural baptism is for believers only.

Secondly, in order for baptism to be valid or scriptural it must involve the proper form. The proper form for baptism, the scriptural form, is immersion in water. And there are three solid decisive reasons why we can say this. We know that the scriptural form of baptism is immersion in water because of the very meaning of the word baptize. The Greek word, which the New Testament uses for baptism, is the word *Baptizo* and it always means and can only mean to dip, to plunge, to immerse. Consult any standard Greek lexicon to verify this fact. The Greek word for sprinkle is *Rhantizo* and the Greek word for pour is *Katacheo*. Never is either word used in the New Testament in connection with baptism. Neither sprinkling nor pouring for baptism was taught or practiced in the New Testament.

Not only does the New Testament word baptize mean to immerse in water but all the descriptions of baptism given in the New Testament point to immersion as well. John 3:23 speaks of baptism involving “much water”. Acts 8:38-39 tells us of Phillip taking the just converted Ethiopian “down into the water” to baptize him and then of bringing him “up out of the water.” Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 speak of our being “buried” in baptism.

The symbolism of baptism also requires the form of immersion. Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the participation of the believer in those events as we read in Romans 6:3-4. “Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” There is one thing that must be done to a man before it can be said that he has been buried and that is he must be covered up. Sprinkling a few clods on one’s head doesn’t bury him and neither does sprinkling a few drops of water on one’s head symbolize his burial. For these three reasons Baptists insist on immersion as the proper form of all valid baptism.

Immersion is the form of baptism ordained by God, submitted to by Christ himself, and commanded to His followers. Methodists give the candidate his option of either immersion or sprinkling. American or Northern Baptists voted some years ago to have local option as to the form of baptism. Listen! The New Testament offers no choice of forms. The New Testament prescribes only one form to be utilized in scriptural baptism.

In order to be scriptural baptism it must involve the proper design or purpose. God has designed baptism to serve as a symbol, a picture, a figure of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ. In I Peter 3:21, the apostle Peter calls baptism a “figure.” Paul tells us in Romans 6:3-4 that baptism pictures an experience already enjoyed by the Christian.

The scriptural design of baptism is not to serve as a sacrament or a means of grace. It is not a sacrament. Baptism does not save nor help save. Scriptural baptism is designed to be a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and of the believer’s death to sin and resurrection with Christ to walk in newness of life.

Baptism to be valid must involve the proper administrator and the proper administrator is a local New Testament church. Baptists believe that a New Testament church is a body of baptized believers in Jesus Christ banded together to carry out the great commission and which holds steadfastly to the doctrines and practices of the New Testament. The authority for baptizing has been given by Christ to the local churches. He gave to the churches the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 to make, baptize, and teach disciples. As we read in I Corinthians 11:2 the apostle Paul delivered the ordinances (baptism and the Lord’s supper) to the church at Corinth and thus to all the churches. They are church ordinances to be observed by the churches.

Whenever I baptize a person I say, “Brother so and so, upon your profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the authority of this church, and in obedience to His command, I now baptize you my brother in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” The reason I always say this is in recognition of the fact that the authority for baptizing that candidate is in the local church of which I am pastor.

So valid scriptural baptism involves the proper candidate – a believer in Jesus Christ. It involves the proper form – immersion in water. It involves the proper design – to symbolize what the candidate has believed and experienced. And it involves the proper administrator – a local New Testament church.

WHAT CONSTITUTES ALIEN BAPTISM?

Alien baptism is any baptism that does not meet the four simple scriptural standards that we have just considered. Alien baptism is any baptism that involves the wrong candidates, specifically baptism that involves infants. A person sprinkled as a baby when it is impossible for that person to repent of his sin and believe the gospel is, according to the scriptures, unbaptized. Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians are some of the denominations which practice paedobaptism or baptism of children.

Alien baptism is any baptism that involves use of the wrong form such as sprinkling or pouring. Most nonbaptist denominations either sprinkle or pour for baptism.

Alien baptism is any baptism that involves the wrong design or purpose. Any baptism that is administered for the saving of the soul or as a means of grace or as a sacrament is alien baptism. Most denominations, either by direct teaching or by implication, teach that salvation is by baptism. This includes the Church of Christ, the Christian Church, and the Lutherans. The Roman Catholic “Catechism for Adults” by James Alberione (Vatican II edition) makes the following very clear statement about the Roman Catholic view of the design of baptism: “What

is the importance of baptism? Baptism confers the grace of justification...in baptism the followers of Christ truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature.”

Alien baptism is any baptism that has the wrong administrator. The wrong administrator refers to those who do not in some way meet the scriptural qualifications for a church. It would include churches who believe in salvation by works whether it is by keeping the sacraments by submitting to baptism or by some other work. The wrong administrator would include churches that believe it is possible for a Christian to lose his salvation. This of course includes Methodists, Pentecostals, and Freewill Baptists who are actually little more than immersing Methodists. The wrong administrator would include churches who believe it is possible for a Christian to live above sin in this world. This includes various so-called “holiness” groups such as the Nazarenes. The wrong administrator would include churches that deny the Trinity of the Godhead and thus do not baptize in the name of the Trinity. This would include the Oneness Pentecostals and various cult groups.

Alien baptism is any baptism administered by an individual not authorized by a local New Testament church. Several years ago a well known Baptist evangelist in the Oklahoma City area baptized his converts in the swimming pools of various area motels without authorization by a local church. Alien baptism is any baptism that does not conform to the four simple scriptural requirements for valid baptism.

WHY DON'T BAPTIST CHURCHES RECOGNIZE ALIEN BAPTISM?

First of all because to do so would be to contradict the teachings of the scriptures about baptism. We Baptists believe that the baptisms of other denominations, are null and void because they lack one or more of the four scriptural requirements for valid baptism. No rightly instructed Baptist church will recognize the ordinances of unbaptized societies as being valid or scriptural. We do not believe that members of other denominations have been scripturally baptized therefore we require those coming to us from those other groups to be properly baptized before becoming members of our churches.

W.T. Conner the late and great theologian of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary said in his book “Christian Doctrine,” “[We do not] recognize the baptism of people who do not themselves submit to the ordinance as set forth in the New Testament – many of these bodies practicing sprinkling or pouring for baptism, many of them not requiring a profession of faith in Christ as a condition of baptism and some of them baptizing people as a condition of receiving the remission of sins.” To recognize alien baptism as being valid baptism would be to contradict the scriptures.

Baptist churches do not recognize alien baptism because to do so would involve some very serious irregularities for our churches. One is that recognizing alien baptism places the authority of men above the authority of the written word and this is always wrong. As Peter says in another context, “We ought to obey God rather than man.”

A second irregularity which recognizing alien baptism involves is that it places tradition above the written word of God. Allowing an unbaptized man to come into the church because he finds

it impossible to forsake the traditions of his fathers is placing tradition above the scriptures. What the Lord Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees in Mark 7:9 certainly applies to those who hold to the traditions of other churches rather than submitting to scriptural Baptist baptism. "...Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

Recognizing alien baptism places the conscience of the individual above the written word of God. When we allow people to come into the church without scriptural baptism because their consciences tell them that their alien baptisms are enough then we place conscience above scripture. I know a Baptist pastor in the state of Alabama who has a Methodist baptism. When I asked him about it, he said that he was satisfied with that baptism and thus had never submitted to scriptural Baptist baptism. Most denominations will tell you that the type of baptism which one has doesn't make any difference just so a person feels right about his own. But baptism's validity is not determined by whether the subject is satisfied with it. The question is this; is the Lord satisfied with that baptism? Does that baptism square with the scriptures? These are three irregularities which recognizing alien baptism brings into our churches. And of course irregularities relating to baptism will soon lead to other irregularities in our churches.

A third reason Baptists don't recognize alien baptism is because to do so would be to deny the very meaning of the name Baptist. Our name was originally Anabaptist and meant literally re-baptizers. Through the years the prefix *Ana* was dropped as a matter of convenience and we are now called simply Baptists. Historically Baptists were called Anabaptists or rebaptizers because we do not believe that members of other denominations have been scripturally baptized and so when they join our churches we require them to be scripturally baptized.

The name Baptist is a distinguishing name. It differentiates all who hold it from all other denominations. It marks the peculiarities of the people who wear it. The name Baptist distinguishes those who baptize saved people from those who do not. It distinguishes those who are baptized Christians from those who are not. Most Protestants today treat baptism as a nonessential and as more or less insignificant. Brother that's not the way Baptists see baptism as our very name indicates. For a Baptist church to recognize alien baptism is unbaptistic. Actually a church which does so ceases to be a Baptist church in any biblical and historical sense.

CONCLUSION

True Baptists reject all baptisms from other groups who are not in accord with the New Testament. Our Baptist belief about alien baptism is very upsetting to some in other denominations. Martin Luther is reported to have become so upset with this and other Baptist doctrines that he once said ...I'd *rather be wrong than be a Baptist!* Sometimes people will say in regard to this matter "Christians ought to be more charitable than Baptists are and make sacrifices to promote union among the various churches." A person can make any sacrifice he wants in order to help bring about unity among Christians but he must never do so if it means disobeying the Lord. As Samuel said in I Samuel 15:22, ..."to obey is better than sacrifice." A church owes its first obligation to Christ Jesus, its great sovereign Head. When unity with our brothers comes into conflict with our duty to God we must obey God and leave the results with Him. We don't owe anything to a Christian brother that makes it necessary for us to disobey God! We cannot for the sake of fellowship or unity forsake scriptural baptism! We can't do it!

Scriptural baptism is an unbridgeable gap between sound Baptist churches and the ecumenical movement. As long as we will not accept the baptisms of Catholics and Protestants we cannot ecumenicalize with them. Let us determine to follow the scriptures in this matter and thus to receive no one into our churches who has not been scripturally baptized.

We Baptists certainly do not look on those with unscriptural baptisms as being unsaved. We simply look at them as being irregular in the matter of baptism. We do not regard non-baptists as being baptized. We'd like to work this matter out and we'd like to have unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ in other denominations and we still say with our Baptist forefathers in early America, "We love our pouring and sprinkling Calvinistic brethren and we'd love to meet them out in the middle of the Jordan River and there forever bury all our differences."

Maybe you are reading this message and you are a Christian but you have never submitted to scriptural Baptist baptism. Is it pride that is keeping you from doing so? You're just too proud to submit after all these years with an unscriptural baptism? God Hates pride! Pride needs to be repented of. Is it tradition that is keeping you from submitting to scriptural baptism? Your family members have always been members of another denomination and this tradition is keeping you from being properly baptized. Are you then placing tradition above the written word of God? James 4:17 says, "...To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." You who know what the Bible teaches about baptism and yet have not submitted to it, listen to the words which Ananias spoke to Saul of Tarsus, "And now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized!"

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