

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 388

Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8

Verses: Acts 8:36-38

Topic: Immediate Baptism

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Acts 8:36-38 MKJV And as they passed along the way, they came on some water. And the eunuch said, See, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized? (37) Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, it is lawful. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (38) And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch. And he baptized him.

In Acts baptism immediately follows conversion at Pentecost (Acts 2:38,39), with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38), at Cornelius's house (Acts 10:47,48), with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33) with Saul after his conversion (Acts 9:18) and with Lydia (Acts 16:13-15). In fact on every occasion when the time of baptism is mentioned it is immediately after conversion. This lead to the word "baptism" also being used in the early church for "conversion" as in 'at your baptism' to mean 'when you were converted.

There is no record of anyone being baptized prior to conversion. Neither is there any record of people being baptized a long while after conversion. Baptism and conversion were one integral reality.

In fact three things were supposed to hang together – believing in Jesus Christ, being baptized in His name, and receiving the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost the 3000 converts first believed, then were baptized, then received the Holy Spirit – but all on one day. The Samaritans believed and were baptized, but received the Holy Spirit when the apostles came down and laid hands on them. Also Apollos and some Ephesian disciples seem to have missed out on receiving the Holy Spirit and had to have it explained to them some time later.

The separation of these three components is not ideal but has become normal:

- a) Early on persecution made people wary about new members of the community who might betray them, so candidates for baptism were put through a long course of instruction first to check them out.
- b) Later plagues made people fear for the salvation of their children so infant baptism was introduced and followed by confirmation and the "receiving of the Holy

Spirit”.

c) This was then exacerbated by those who taught of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a “second experience”, when it should be an initial experience.

d) Or in some cases baptism in the Holy Spirit is eliminated by those who say it just happens automatically when people believe – but it is never automatic in Acts!

In Acts baptism is lawful for anyone who “believes with all their heart” that is someone who understands their faith and is committed to it as the “heart” was the center of life understanding.

The Ethiopian eunuch’s confession “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” is the basic minimum confession generally required for salvation. John the apostle calls this confession “the faith that overcomes the world”: 1 John 5:4-5 MKJV For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Thus anyone who can believe with all their heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is a suitable candidate for baptism. The further development of doctrine can wait.

In fact if we go back to our three-fold formula – faith, baptism in water, baptism in the Spirit, it makes sense to wait until the power of the Spirit is upon a person before engaging in the deeper aspects of discipleship.

What then should we do about our church structures, very few of which follow this model? Gentle admonition at most. Do not be divisive over these things but point them out in love. Hundreds of years of history will not be undone by a single blazing dispute.

But first look at your own life: Have you believed? Are you baptized in water? Have you received the Holy Spirit? Please fix your own life first!

People always ask about the mode of baptism. In Acts it is always by immersion, and of those who have personal faith in Jesus. Baptism can be done by any mature believer but is generally best done by the leader of the Christian community the convert belongs to. However as with Indich here, there is no church, no pulpit, no ceremony, just a creek by the road and that is sufficient.

Baptism has enormous theological implications about dying and rising with Christ and being dead to sin and alive to righteousness (see Romans 6). It should not be avoided. It must be taken seriously but it does not need to be institutionalized, formalized or delayed. It is a living form, a part of the gospel of the living God, and moves with the Spirit – and can be performed even under the most informal of conditions. It is not an expression of religion or of human membership in a “club” but of faith in God and allegiance to Christ and spiritual incorporation into the mystical body of Christ in all its local expressions.

Blessings,

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