

Believers' Baptism

We read in Genesis that when God created Adam He first made a body from clay, then He breathed into that body the breath of life (literally "lifes") and Adam became a living soul. In these few words are contained a mystery of which science is still largely ignorant, namely that man comprises a body, a spirit, and a soul, the latter being the product of the first two. It is being a living soul that makes man unique in all creation, and sets him apart from the animals.

Animals have bodies, but not spirits.

Angels have spirits, but not bodies.

Man alone has a body **and** a spirit dwelling within it, and **the combination of the two** produces the soul.

Many Christians find it difficult at first to distinguish between the functions of at least two of these three, for they are not each contained in watertight compartments but are inter-dependent and interactive. However we can distinguish some of their essential and principal functions, thus:-

The principal and essential functions of the body are:- Sensory activity, Instinct, and Motion.

The principal and essential functions of the spirit are:- Communion, Conscience, and Intuition.

The principal and essential functions of the soul are:- Emotion, Reason, and the Will.

It is the last of these, the will, which is the sole purpose of man's existence and the reason for his creation at all. Animals have at best only very minimal powers of independent will (although anybody who has had to saddle-up a horse which has a marked preference for remaining in its stable may dispute that statement!) However, animals act in accordance with the instincts with which they were born, modified by such behavioural patterns as they have learned along the way (for example breathing-in, holding their breath, and standing on your foot when you are tightening-up the girth). But in reality, no animal can possibly compare or compete with man in his ability to ignore the demands of his senses and instincts and, by a conscious decision of the will, act in a way which goes completely counter to them.

Spirits too are either light or darkness. They too act in accordance with their nature, but lacking free will (which is a property of man's soul) we know of no means by which they can change from being one to the other. Spirits of light we call angels, and spirits of darkness we call demons. (We shall leave on one side for the moment Satan's metamorphosis into an angel of light, and deal with him when we come to consider the subject of antichrist). For the present purpose we need to consider how things were created at the beginning, and we need to remember that in the beginning our first father Adam was given a body; into that body God breathed a spirit; and as a result Adam became a living soul. The body and the soul comprise the flesh.

We read that God then caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. He took one of Adam's ribs, and from it made a woman and brought her to the man. Adam said "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh", and he called the woman Isha because she had been taken out of Man (Ish). The woman's spirit and soul were taken out of Adam, therefore they *were* Adam's. Only her body was fashioned differently. The man and the woman each had their own body (and *vive la difference!*) but they shared one soul. This point is important. When a man and a woman have a child, each parent contributes a set of chromosomes to the embryo; but the child's spirit comes only from its father, not from its mother. We shall see shortly why this is important.

Continuing our narrative we come to the unhappiness of the fall in Genesis III. Adam disobeyed God's command, and the result was that his spirit received a death sentence. The sentence was not immediately executed, but because God had said "Thou shalt surely die" Adam's eventual death became certain. In the very moment that Adam took the fruit and ate it, his spirit was poisoned by sin and became subject to death. And because he and his wife were one flesh (they shared the same spirit and soul because Eve had been taken out of Adam) the same thing happened within the woman. Their spirit did not cease to exist, but because it had been cursed by God its death became certain. The spirit of Adam became comatose and useless, unable properly to fulfil its normal functions and having no future before it but the grave. For the time being Adam's body continued to live, having a biological life like that of the animals; but Adam's spirit was mortally wounded. The situation was most serious.

Adam and his wife had children, and those children inherited from their parents individual bodies animated by biological life, but a common spirit from Adam which had been mortally afflicted. Because their bodies were unique to each of them they were each of them a unique soul, but they all inherited and shared one spirit, the spirit of Adam, and that spirit was as good as dead. And this was the universal condition of all the descendants of our first parents down until the time of Christ. Physically alive, but spiritually dead.

Now the whole scene changes for the better! God did something new, fresh, and absolutely wonderful. We shall feel our hearts lift as we ponder the glorious wonder of the incarnation of Jesus!

We have seen that because of sin the human race was in deep trouble. Adam had sinned. We were all of us in Adam at the time, unborn but in his loins, so we all participated in his sin and God's sentence of death therefore passed upon us all. What can possibly be done for us?

Only God could have devised so miraculous a solution to our insuperable difficulty.

He found a Godly young woman (Jewish women in the first century typically married at the age of twelve or thirteen, so most likely that was Mary's age when the angel Gabriel was sent to bring her the momentous news of the unique part God had chosen her to play in His plan of salvation). After Gabriel had departed, the Holy Spirit of God quickened a normal human egg within Mary's womb with His own Spirit, and that egg began to grow as a human embryo. Instead of having received by sexual intercourse the sperm of a human father containing the lifeless spirit of Adam, Mary's embryonic child contained, and was given life by, the Spirit of God Himself. Jesus was born with a full complement of maternally-derived chromosomes, but with no paternally-derived chromosomes at all. His Father was not Joseph but God. And most importantly of all, He was never contaminated by the death carried by the spirit of Adam, for He was not born of any son of Adam. He was born of God.

In the sight of God there have only ever been two men. The first was Adam; the last is Christ. Every one of us, when we were born, received from our human father the spirit of Adam, and that spirit was as good as dead when we were born.¹ We were born "in Adam", and in Adam we all die. Let us consider a little more fully the glorious person of Jesus Christ. Mary's ancestry is traceable back through the family line to David, Judah, and Abraham, so after the flesh, in His body, Jesus is a son of Abraham and of David. But after the spirit He is a son of God, and the firstborn now of many brethren.

Now the impartial reader of the New Testament cannot fail to spot that pretty soon after people believed in Jesus, they commonly got themselves baptised. The Ethiopian eunuch didn't hesitate a minute, but stopped his chariot at the first pool they came to and got right down in the water where

¹ It is possible artificially to stimulate the spirit of Adam into activity by engaging in contact with demons by way of occult practices. But a human spirit thus artificially stimulated is not alive; it's a zombie. In the sight of God it is a vile and repulsive thing, a walking corpse. The psychic powers developed by spiritistic mediums and other occultists derive from this source, and in the sight of God they are most horrible. Only the Blood of Jesus can cleanse a soul thus most foully contaminated. A servant of God must avoid ALL SUCH CONTACT with demonic powers for they are death. *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."*

Philip could baptise him. It was much the same with Cornelius. The moment that Peter saw that Cornelius and his family had believed, "he commanded them to be baptised".

No baptism classes, no church meeting, no testimony, no Bible verses, no bunches of flowers and baptism certificates, no hymns, no nothin'. Just plain old baptised, under the water, Kersplosh!, on the spot then and there.

(Why is it that men have to dress things up and make some fancy ceremonial out of what God made so simple? Is it so that they can act the High Priest and give themselves airs as stewards of a mystic rite? Or because they've got to fill the time between 6.30 and 8pm somehow? Or because they've never bothered to think about it, but have just copied what was done in their last church? Probably a bit of all three.)

As God shut up Noah and his family safely into the ark, so also has God shut us up safely in Christ. And as the waters that bore down in judgment upon the earth were also the means of bearing up the ark, so also will God's coming judgment upon the world be the means of revealing the sons of God who are safe in Christ. Peter says that the great flood which destroyed the old world was only a type, a fore-shadowing symbol, of baptism! That's how important baptism is. (1 Peter 3; 20-22)

So then, by the grace and mercy of God we have believed into Christ, and have received His spirit within us, the spirit of adoption as his son or daughter; What then has happened to our old spirit, the one that we inherited from Adam, during all this? What says the scripture? "No man shall see God and live." At the moment we **saw** God in Christ, our old man, Adam, that had been as good as dead since first we sinned, at last finally and really died. And what do you do with a dead body? You bury it that's what, and as soon as possible if you've got any sense! And how do you bury a dead spiritual body?

"We are buried with Him in baptism." (Romans 6; 3-4 and Colossians 2; 12).

Is there such a thing as baptismal regeneration? No, there most certainly isn't. But there most certainly is such a thing as baptismal burial! If the believer has faith to believe into the life of Christ, then he can also believe into the death and burial of Christ. There are many Christians who believe and teach that when we are born again God quickens (or brings to life) our human spirit by infusing it in some way with the Holy Spirit. The exact opposite is true. When we are born again, God kills off our contaminated human spirit completely and, so that we should not die physically as a result, He puts His own spirit within us.

Let me give an illustration. When a gardener takes a branch from one fruit tree and grafts it into the trunk of another, the branch ceases completely from that moment to have any more to do with the old tree, but draws all its life henceforth from the roots of the new tree. As far as the branch is concerned, the old tree is past history, and its trunk and roots are now those of the new tree. The branch's past history as far as roots are concerned has become the past history of the new tree.

Similarly at that precise moment when God grafts us into Christ, whether we are aware of it or not, everything that happened to Jesus in His past becomes part of our own past experience. Our old root was Adam, but our new root is Christ. God changes our ancestry for us, so our personal past experience obviously changes with it. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Because Jesus died to the world, I also died to the world (Romans 6; 3). Because Jesus was buried, I also was buried (verse 4). Because Jesus rose from the dead, I also have risen with Him (verse 4). And because Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven, I also am right now seated at the right hand of God in heaven (Ephesians 2; 5-6). Because, and only because, I am now in Him.

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you there when He rose up from the dead?"

The negro slave who wrote that hymn knew he was there, because God had shown him that He had placed him in Christ, and in Christ he really had been there in first century Israel.

When the believer is shown this by the Holy Spirit, his response will be baptism, the ANSWER of a good conscience towards God. Baptism is our response to God when He shows us that we have died with Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3; 21). God says to us "You have died with Christ", and we reply "Then let us bury the dead".

Note please that baptising somebody who has never believed into Christ will be a complete and utter waste of time. You can't bury a live body that hasn't died, and this applies to adults just as well as infants. The question is not "should we baptise infants?" but "should we baptise those who have never personally seen and believed into Jesus Christ?" and the answer is emphatically No. Infant or adult, the Old Adam will simply come up out of the water again. Needless to say, the medieval practice of baptism of infants, complete with promises by proxy, is a muddle-headed myth. Now I do believe it is of great value to a child that its parents should bring it to the church so as to present the infant before the Lord, and I believe too that The Lord God is well pleased with such faith and will surely watch over a child so presented to Him. But baptism, No.

Baptism however is fundamental to the start of a believer's Christian life, it's not an optional extra. When you have come to faith in Jesus you need to be baptised, for until you are you will be carrying around with you a spiritual corpse which is part of the old world, and which is together with it under God's judgment and heading for destruction. That is why it is written,

"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ..."

Just as a physical corpse soon begins to decay and go corrupt when its life is removed, so also will the corpse of the 'old man' be a source of spiritual corruption to us unless we bury it. Through it the world will poison our living, until it is severed from us. The fact that so many believers have never been baptised since they believed is one of the reasons for the worldliness and corruption of much of the church.

Note please that baptism has nothing at all to do with church membership lists (except in the spiritual sense of membership of the body of Christ). Still less is it any kind of initiation ceremony into any particular denomination. When folk come to real faith in Jesus Christ they should be baptised. No messing about, no baptism classes, no public testimony, no nothing! Many churches insist for example that a believer give some sort of public testimony to their faith before they will admit them to baptism. This is completely unscriptural and should cease. Some people relish public speaking, but others are terrified at the mere thought and draw back from being baptised as a result. Public testimony is of no relevance to baptism, and a mere tradition of men that puts such a stumbling block before young believers is disgraceful. If the truth were told, I suspect that one reason for this testimony business is that it makes more of a 'church ceremony' of the occasion. God forgive us!

Other churches will baptise only those who have reached some arbitrary age of discretion, before which they are assumed to be incapable of 'making a meaningful commitment'. Do we question the same child's commitment to his physical Father? Then where, pray, is our scriptural authority to deny his commitment to his spiritual Father? And in any case, it's not commitment that matters. If a child of five has been born again, (and some really are born again at that age) he should be baptised. Age and intellectual development are irrelevant, it's parentage that counts. And the sooner that rotting corpse of the Old Adam is buried the better, whatever age it is.

It is of course taken for granted that the evangelist or pastor will know when a person has been born again. For the life of me I cannot understand how some can teach that it is not our place to know where a person stands before God: It's fundamental to the work of preaching and pastoring that we know beyond all doubt. How do you know? Just get them to talk about Jesus, and you'll know. If you know Him yourself, that is?