

*What About Those
Temple
Ordinances?*

Baptism for the Dead

A Fallacy



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What About Those Temple Ordinances?

Baptism for the Dead

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In all matters of doctrine pertaining to the Kingdom of God, it is important to determine if it actually originated with God, or if it is of human production. If it is Of God, it is of vital importance, for it is manifestly calculated to improve and perfect man's relationship with Him, or to reveal something of the scope of the divine plan of salvation. On the other hand, if the doctrine is an imposition of man, it can only serve human interests at the expense of the divine. This is not to say that God's plans are frustrated by false doctrine, whether instigated by men or the devil. Man is deceived, and he suffers the consequence, while God's purposes are fulfilled in those, whether many or few, who give heed to the voice of the "good Shepherd".

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Let us, then, analyze the doctrine of baptism for the dead from the standpoint of determining its validity as an essential part of the plan of salvation. To do so, we will not be amiss in giving some thought to the principle of baptism, for whether it applies to the living or dead, there must be a common conception for both. This treatise assumes that the reader acknowledges the principle of baptism as a divine requirement, and hence, a fundamental to the plan of salvation. The Scriptures are clear on this point, with some Protestant churches to the contrary, notwithstanding. Reference is made to another tract, entitled, "Baptism".

Jesus said:

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

And again, by way of elaboration:

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God,” John 3:3,5.

It is, apparently, because of such positive declarations by the Master, that some feel assured of the divinity of baptism for the dead. Conclusion is reached that, without baptism, it is impossible to be saved. Admittedly, if these statements of Christ stand alone, if there are no equally admiss-

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ible Scriptures which shed light upon the subject, they stand as an indestructible verity. It is not intended to suggest conflict in the word of God, for God does not change. However, human conception of truth is subject to error; but, by the Spirit of truth, related Scriptures can be made to harmonize, which from a surface appraisal, could otherwise appear at variance. This is the reason for so many doctrines, professedly the doctrine of Christ, and the reason for the multitude of churches of men. Some will accept one Scripture (or their understanding of it), and reject another; while others profess the opposite. The answer is not in placing one Scripture against another, but the harmonizing of the two, unless it can be shown that the inspired writer's intent was to point up a concept of man at plain variance with the word of God. Such is the case with the doctrine of baptism for the dead, as we expect to develop.

Let us consider that first statement of Christ: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

It is generally conceded that because of Adam's transgression, mankind fell; death was pronounced upon him, and this death was both physical and spiritual (see 2 Nephi 6:11-27 and Helaman 5:69,70); the spiritual

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death being that man was cut off from the presence of God. He became unclean, unrighteous, and unable to endure the holy fire of God's presence; it would consume him. This rejection by God was an act of mercy until the plan of redemption should be consummated by the sacrifice, the infinite atonement, of the Son of God. This single act of infinite love ensured the resurrection of all mankind, satisfying the demands of divine justice imposed because of the transgression of Adam; man was made alive again, though death was the door. However, through personal transgression, the seed of spiritual death is again implanted. The resurrection of Christ does not suffice for this, but obedience to the Gospel plan (faith, repentance, baptism), in which the word of God takes root in the human breast, will destroy the "seed" of sin if continually t
nourished until the end.

The words of Christ are pointed and plain:

“And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name, shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father, at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. And he that endureth not unto the end, the

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same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the *fire*, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father: and this is the word which he hath given unto the children of men.” 3 Nephi 12:29,30.

Again, we have the words of the Apostle Paul:

“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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Romans 6:3-6.

We have quoted extensively to show that the Scriptures teach plainly that baptism is applicable to this mortal existence; it requires a conscious choice of each person for himself, not only in the initial act of

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baptism, but as evidence of the new birth, he should not henceforth serve sin. The act of baptism, alone, nor yet having hands laid upon the head to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, cannot ensure this new birth, but it is evidenced by continuance in the word of God and struggle against sin until the end.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Rev. 2:7.

This, then, is God’s plan. He never changes His plan, and has empowered men to implement that plan, so far as they were able and inspired to do so. God’s plan is infinite, but man, His tool, is finite (limited). It should be a self-evident fact that the totality of the master plan is only partially fulfilled by man; it requires nothing less than the infinite power, love, and accomplishment embodied by the Son of God. If He were to depend entirely upon man’s volition and ability, how pitifully inadequate would be the result!

The primitive church of the first apostles *may have* effected eternal life for tens of thousands, but what of the millions within the stretch of perhaps five hundred years of that church’s reach? And of the staggering multitudes before this time? What of the untold millions of modern

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times who have not been reached with the fullness of the Gospel of Christ?

We are asked to believe that through genealogical work, all these countless millions of the human race, from Adam to the present, are to be numbered, and baptism be performed for them, vicariously. This is utterly impossible! The research alone, is an impossible job, for complete records simply do not exist. Even Biblical or Book of Mormon genealogy is woefully inadequate for the task. Take any New Testament character you please, in the church or outside, and try to follow the line to the present; the same with the Book of Mormon. This shows the folly of such a doctrine.

It is asserted that when one has been baptized for another who is dead, the dead person will then determine if he wishes to accept of the baptism. Our previous reasoning from Scripture, relative to being “born again”, refutes this thought, which is only the result of human speculation.

Now, let us examine the only Scripture to be found in either the Bible or Book of Mormon which even hints at the idea of baptism for the dead. This is found in I Corinthians 15:29, thus:

“Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead,

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if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?”

Paul continues on, verse 30:

“And why stand we in jeopardy every hour.”

It appears that he makes a distinct line of cleavage, here, between “they” who are baptized for the dead, and “we”. The whole chapter is a dissertation on the question of the resurrection, but Paul, incidentally refers to some who are baptized for the dead.

It is important to notice, at this juncture, that there had been conversions to Christ from a number of ideological strains, and some of these people had, no doubt, clung to certain beliefs which had characterized their former persuasion, though accepting the person of Jesus as the Christ. The Pharisees accepted the principle of the resurrection, independent of an acceptance of Christ, while the Sadducees denied the resurrection. At times, Paul used this division between these sects for the benefit of the Kingdom of God. Another dispute with the church was over the question of circumcision. This was argued heatedly because it had been a fixed doctrine of the Jews from Abraham’s time. It had been given

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of God, but superimposed upon the Gospel law as a type, or shadow, of the circumcision of heart which would be required after all things had become new, with the passing of the old covenant. (II Cor. 5:17). As a consequence of the influx of such matter, the apostles were hard pressed to maintain the purity of the Gospel stream from the muddying interjections of human doctrines. Small wonder, then that the Apostle Paul exclaimed:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Gal. 1:6-9.

Paul was possessed of a godly jealousy for the saints, ever striving to protect them from false teachers and their doctrines. The very paucity of Scripture upon such an important issue as baptism for the dead casts a large shadow of doubt upon its divinity. Paul was not affirming this concept, but states that “they” who accept it are foolish in the practice unless they also

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believe in the resurrection.

We are not alone in this conclusion of the apostle's intent, for the following support comes from Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament—I and II Corinthians, page 364, relative to the text in question, and in which the author critically examines the Greek rendition:

“Every such baptism will be without any meaning if the deniers of the resurrection are in the right. But that a baptism of such a kind effected anything, was assuredly a thought foreign to the apostle. He wished to point out the subjective absurdity of the procedure in the case assumed.”

The author points out that some in the church practiced baptism for the dead (but not according to the apostle's doctrine), believing that such baptism would be effective for believers who had died without baptism, and then said:

“This custom propagated and maintained itself afterwards only among heretical sects.”

A footnote says:

“It is to be noted that Paul does not speak inclusive way, as if of something common to all, but as of

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third persons. He designates only those who did it.”

Smith’s Bible Dictionary refers to this practice, thus:

“Tertullian tells us of a custom of vicarious baptism as existing among the Marcionites; and St. Chrysostom relates of the same heretics, that, when one of their catechumens died without baptism, they used to put a living person under the dead man’s bed, and asked whether he desired to be baptized; the living man answered that he did, they then baptized him in place of the departed.”

By these things, we affirm that baptism for the dead is of human imposition, and not at all sustained by the Scriptures of the Bible and Book of Mormon; that baptism properly requires personal acceptance and obedience, and this, too, during mortal existence.

We further affirm that baptism is a two-fold experience, consisting of the visible sign of obedience through immersion by one having authority from God, and secondly, by the laying on of hands of authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. By the latter, comes the immersion of the Spirit, according to the candidate’s

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development of oneness with God. This is not always immediately evident; it may take years, and in some, may never be fully consummated.

Eusebius, called “the father of church historians”, wrote concerning aspersion, or sprinkling, as applied to baptism. A man named Novatus, about AD. 263, was diseased and at the point of death, and this aspersion was performed. He recovered from the disease, but did not “partake of other things, which the rules of the church prescribe as duty, *nor was he sealed* (in confirmation) by the bishop. But as he did not obtain this, how could he obtain the Holy Spirit?” Eccles. History, page 366.

Thus, it has ever been recognized that baptism without the sealing of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands was ineffectual.

While it is true that adherents to the doctrine of baptism for the dead, practice, in this connection, the laying on of hands upon one as proxy, or in behalf of one who has died, the fact can only add to the astonishment of those with spiritual discernment of the divine law. Proxy baptism and laying on of hands would effectively place man in a similar mediatorial role as Jesus Christ, who laid down His life as a substitutionary sacrifice

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for all. Such a thought approaches blasphemy and is repugnant to the divine plan requiring an infinite atonement.

Justification for the practice of baptism for the dead is evidently based upon the statement of Christ's quoted originally in this treatise. It is assumed that since but comparatively few hear and obey the Gospel covenant, something *must* be done by man for the countless millions who have not been thus secured to the Kingdom of God. We repeat the previous comment: if God were required to place total dependence upon human instrumentality in the accomplishment of the divine purpose, how woefully lacking would be the results!

We are not left, however, to wishful thinking. The Scriptures reveal sufficient light to warrant us in the hope and understanding that provision is made, through infinite compassion, for the multitudes of those who are ignorant of the divine plan. It is not our purpose to exhaust these Scriptural resources, but to give sufficient to establish a reason for allaying anxious desires regarding such.

The compassion of God, through Jesus Christ, is foreshadowed, or typified, by the provision under Moses that:

“ . . . If any soul sin through

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ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.” Numbers 15:27,28.

Paul speaks of the righteousness of the law adhered to by Gentiles (which is not to be confused with the adherence to the Gospel covenant through baptism), that they “are a law unto themselves”; they are justified as “doers of the law”. See Romans 2. Again, he speaks of Israel as being “ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). Taken together, we can see that the ignorant are justified through personal righteousness, but are not sanctified by the Gospel law.

The Book of Mormon clarifies our understanding more fully upon this important consideration. Mormon, in writing to his son, Moroni (Moroni 8), clearly shows who are accountable before God, and are subjects for baptism, but that “little children are alive in Christ” (verse 13), and will be saved without baptism (verse 14).

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The principle is enlarged in verses 25 to 27:

“For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and *also all they that are without the law*. For the power of redemption cometh on all they that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, can not repent; and unto such *baptism availeth nothing*. But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and *putting trust in dead works*.”

Dead works, indeed, have entered also into the restored church of the latter days!

Lest this is insufficient, we quote also from Mosiah 1:107:

“For behold, and also his blood (of Christ) atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died, not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.”

Also, this:

“And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having

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salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.” Mosiah 8:58,59.

By these Scriptures, we can see that baptism is not required for such as are “without the law”, and to assume otherwise is to trust in dead works and to set at naught the atoning blood of Christ; it is, in fact, a “mockery before God”; it is not the doctrine of Christ.

Latter day revelation from God will not conflict with what He has revealed in the Bible and Book of Mormon:

“To the law (Bible) and to the testimony (Book of Mormon): if they speak not according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*”
Isaiah 8:20.

