

April – June 2009

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”
(Matthew 28:19)

Three Gospel writers were inspired to record detail of the Lord’s Great Commission, given at His tenth post-resurrection appearance. Each account has its particular emphasis, with Matthew stressing the universal mediatorial dominion which is invested in Christ Jesus. He continues by reporting certain specific points of instruction which the Saviour gave, namely:

- 1.) *“Go ye therefore, and teach...”* (which the marginal reading renders as ‘*make disciples*’)
- 2.) *“baptize”* the disciples made, and
- 3.) *‘teach’* the disciples thus baptized *“all”* the counsel of God.

Each of these injunctions demands a more detailed examination.

Firstly, *“Go ye therefore, and teach”*. The Greek word here is ‘to enrol’, or ‘to become’, hence the alternative interpretation given in the Authorised Version, to ‘make disciples’. A similar expression is used in John 4:1 *“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus **made** and baptized more **disciples** than John...”* This term does not mean that by some miraculous power the Apostles could suddenly transform a sinner into a saint; neither is such a conversion achieved by a process of education. Rather does it mean to cause, or bring men and women to a definite point where they turn from their natural ways unto Christ.

Scripture itself furnishes many such examples: *“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”* (Acts 26:28). The Apostle was discoursing with this heathen monarch, and King Agrippa was almost in the Kingdom! Paul was using his most persuasive language, and brought his hearer right to the crisis point – he almost believed. This matter of pleading with sinners is sadly lacking from today’s pulpits; yet it is required of every minister to thus address and challenge the unbeliever: *“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God ”* (2 Corinthians 5:20). The Lord’s ambassadors are to ‘earnestly entreat’ and ‘implore’ the unconverted, as did the prophet of old: *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”* (Isaiah 1:18). The preacher should urge the reasonableness and necessity of calling upon Christ for Salvation, *“turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?”* (Ezekiel 33:11).

Thus is the sinner brought to the point of leaving the broad road, and entering in at the strait gate, from whence leads the narrow way to life eternal. Those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour are ‘enrolled’ so to speak, and ‘become’ Christians. Having come to salvation, and been made a disciple or follower of Christ, that person is secondly, to be **baptized**. Remember the context of these words: the Risen Lord is giving commandment of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God – vital, fundamental teaching is being given – and it is all extremely straightforward. There is nothing complicated or mystical in that which Christ is saying. The order is, that when a person has been saved, and is a professed follower of Christ then baptism is **mandatory**. The instruction given by the Great Head of the Church Himself is that **baptism follows faith**. It certainly does not precede it.

There is abounding within Christendom the erroneous doctrine of Paedo-baptism ('paedo-' meaning 'infants'). Some denominations sprinkle water and call it 'baptism', which is an abuse of the word, since 'baptize' means to dip or immerse. Others recognise the meaning of the language and immerse infants in water. However, the question to be answered is: where did this practice come from? Can the alleged 'baptism' of an infant (even if immersed) line up in any way with the Divine instruction that has been given to the Church? Where in Holy Scripture can Christ be found instructing His Apostles to carry out this ritualistic formality? This is a rite which absolutely reverses Biblical order, and stands in defiance of Christ's express command. Baptism is an ordinance to be carried out **after** a person has become a Christian.

In Article 27 of the Anglican Prayer Book it is stated: "The baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ" – but Christ **never** instituted infant baptism. Quite apart from being 'in agreement' with His instructions, it is in fact at complete variance with them. As for 'retaining' it – yes, the Anglican Church has, and a 'font' for the purpose can be found in any Parish Church. But where has this practice been 'retained' from? From whence did it arise in the first instance? **Rome**. Despite all the popular talk of 'Protestantism' and 'The Reformation', there is still very much Romanism and Babylonianism being religiously maintained.

At the unbiblical ritual of infant sprinkling, the one officiating says: "We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock, and do sign him/her with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he/she shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world and the Devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto life's end. Seeing... that this child is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's Church, let us give thanks to Almighty God for

these benefits.” (Book of Common Prayer). There then follows a prayer, in which it is said: “We yield Thee hearty thanks most merciful Father, that it hath pleased Thee to regenerate this infant with Thy Holy Spirit, to receive him/her as Thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him/her into Thy Holy Church” (ibid). This is nothing other than aberrant Romish folly, though it be dressed up as the teaching of a so-called Protestant Christian Church. Not one iota of support will be found for it in Holy Scripture.

However, Anglicanism is not alone in the practice of paedobaptism. Presbyterians also maintain it, although their formula is somewhat different: infants are sprinkled with the provision that one or both of the parents are believers. Chapter 28 of the Westminster Confession, section 3 reads: “Dipping of the person into water is not necessary but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon a person”. Section 4 continues: “Not only those that do actually profess faith in, and obedience unto Christ, but also infants of one, or both believing parents are to be baptized.” Basing this article upon the Covenant made with Abraham, the Presbyterians make great issue of the phrase “*and his seed after him*”. Just as circumcision was the sign and seal of the earthly Covenant, so (they say) is baptism to the New Covenant – it is to ‘the seed’, as well as to the believing parent.

A. A. Hodge, Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton, and an ardent supporter of this fallacy wrote of the children of believing parents: “The truth is that faith is required, but it is the faith of the parent acting for the child. The covenant of which baptism is the seal is contracted with the parent, on behalf of the child upon whom the seal is properly applied.” If Hodge’s assertion be correct, and this doctrine is true, then the words of Scripture in John 1 have been denied, and salvation is made to rely on ‘the will of the flesh’ and ‘the will of man’. For would not every Christian parent desire to act

on behalf of their offspring, and so save their children? On this faulty premise, a person becomes a Christian by proxy, and the need for personal faith is eradicated.

Numerous commentators and theologians have similarly erred from the truth. Calvin, in volume 4 of his Institutes of Religion, chapter 16, section 20 states, “the seed of both repentance and faith lies hid in them [infants] by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit”. Charles Hodge was of similar persuasion, and writes in his Systematic Theology, “Let the little ones have their names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, even if afterwards they choose to erase them... Those parents sin grievously against the souls of their children who neglect to consecrate them to God in the ordinance of baptism.” John Murray, of more recent times, yet from the same school wrote, “Baptized infants are to be received as the children of God and treated accordingly.”

Terms such as ‘Reformed’ and ‘Protestant’ have gained wide acceptance in evangelicalism over the years, and are used by many as names for their Churches and descriptions of their theological position. Herein lies great danger, for under the general banner of ‘Reformed’ there is also included the worst errors and malpractices of the Reformers. To stand for the Biblical doctrine of Divine sovereignty in salvation, election, predestination and perseverance is highly commendable; but to call oneself a ‘Calvinist’ is not. John Calvin was no doubt a great expositor on certain lines, but in the vital matter of believer’s baptism he was sadly at variance with the Word of God. Rather than embracing this vocabulary, such labels ought instead to be shunned, for they clearly denote much that is totally unbiblical. The adoption of these names, or the desire to be identified with their historical originators and present-day adherents, is in direct contradiction with the principle of separation from error, and the command of the Lord, who says: “*from such withdraw thyself*” (1 Timothy 6:5).

Children born into Christian families are highly privileged and have many advantages, but to suggest that they are imbued with the seed of repentance and faith, or that their parents' faith will avail anything for them in the sight of God, is preposterous and is opposed to the plain truth of Scripture – in particular that of total depravity. All are born 'in Adam', and in this there is no difference, be that child born to Christians, Pagans, Atheists, Muslims or any other religious or ethnic group. All are under the sentence of death, from birth and a mere biological connection to a Christian predecessor cannot translate a child from union with Adam to union with Christ. Every human child is born into a fallen race. The Bible does not say that 'death has passed upon some', no – "*death [is] passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*" (Romans 5:12). And all "*must be born again*" (John 3:7) if they are ever to enter the Kingdom of Heaven – for "*that which is born of the flesh is flesh*" (John 3:6). It cannot be any other way.

Baptism is not a secondary issue. The mode, manner and subjects of this ordinance are not a matter for human conjecture, nor to be decided upon on the basis of man-made creeds and historic confessions. Believer's Baptism is a **vital** component of the Lord's final charge to His disciples prior to the Ascension. To accept the false teachings of paedobaptism is to deny the Saviour's parting words, and fail in the Great Commission. The teaching of the Risen Christ is positive and direct. He did not say that after professing faith, an individual may like to be baptized, in which case, the ordinance might be administered. No indeed. Baptism is not an optional extra. **Every** follower of Christ is to be baptized, and this is a commandment from the mouth of the Lord – obeyed by His apostles, and perpetuated by the true Church. This is evident from certain references: "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you*" (Acts 2:38); "*And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord*" (Acts 10:48). There were to

be no exceptions. All who came to repentance must go through the waters of baptism. None turned to Peter to excuse themselves, or claimed that rituals undertaken in childhood exempted them from this ordinance. Anyone who has been brought to saving faith but has not submitted to baptism is in a serious situation of disobedience to God's word.

The third aspect of the Great Commission is this: "*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*". The word 'teaching' in verse 20 is different from that used in verse 19. Here, it has its more usual definition of 'imparting learning' or 'instruction'. Here is a great subject, which would take years in its exposition! **All things** that are commanded and set out in the Bible, both positive and negative, are to be taught: all that the Christian is to do, and to be; and all that they are not to do, or be. To reduce this command to its essence means that there is no ruling, directive or instruction given in the Word of God that can be neglected or ignored. Though certain precedents may be hard to understand, difficult to conceive, irksome to the flesh, or contrary to human reason, this makes no difference. Christ says we are to teach and to observe all things that He has commanded. There is no opting out of particular principles, no question of choice in what is to be obeyed. The Great Head has said "*all things*" and that is what He means.

The breadth and scope of this instruction cannot be over stated. There is a magnitude and scale to this Commission which humble the mind and instil godly fear in the heart. Let every Christian be thereby inspired to a more diligent examination of the Scriptures, and also of their own hearts, to see whether they be following in this way of obedience. Only thus will the Lord's words find their fulfilment in the lives of His people.

W. H. Molland
transcribed by R. J. Steward

The Significance of Biblical Baptism for the Present Time

“There is a Biblically justified antagonism of the believer to the world, and therefore of the Church to merely nominal Christendom, the Biblical necessity for which no theological skill can explain away. It is no wonder that in such circles where [the] union of the Church and the world is maintained, nothing may be said concerning Biblical Baptism. For as we have seen, baptism signifies the publicly declared separation of the believer from the world, including the religious world. It is a plain protest against infant baptism and Confirmation, and is rightly regarded as the real separation from the [State] Church. ...it denotes the rejection of the foundations of the State Church, a denial of the right of that Church system to exist at all.

Biblical baptism has, therefore, at the present time not only the permanent meaning which is stated in the New Testament and is confirmed in the experience of believers, but in addition it has – what did not count in primitive Christianity – its significance as a protest against the mass-Christianity of the ‘Christian’ world, and against the world-conformed Christianity of ‘Christendom’. Certainly baptism retains its original significance as an outward testimony to an inward experience of salvation. The full, deep Biblical sense retains its value whenever baptism is performed on a believer in the Biblical manner.

Nevertheless... other principles have found expression which are of the very greatest value. Some points may be mentioned:

- 1.** In our present time an open solemn confession of the Risen Christ is expressly necessary and desirable. If ever, then today, all who have experienced the power of the Risen Christ in their hearts ought to testify this without fear. And without doubt such

a witness is the Original Christian Baptism, which the Lord appointed for His own people.

2. By Biblical Baptism we give in this time of criticism of the Bible a **witness for the Word of God**, in which nothing to us is ‘unimportant’ or secondary’. In baptism we have an appointment of the Lord. And a faithful servant will willingly and conscientiously follow all the appointments of his Master, even if he should not fully understand their purpose.
3. Through Biblical Baptism we further testify to a **fundamental rejection of all human regulations** through which Biblical truth is obscured, curtailed or ‘supplemented’, or [by which] Biblical ordinances are arbitrarily altered.
4. Biblical Baptism is an acknowledgement of the **principles** of the Reformation which protested against the abuses of the Church of Rome: but it is at the same time a protest against the continuing imperfection of the Reformation, the logical conclusion of which includes the abolition of infant baptism.
5. Biblical Baptism is a declaration of our kinship with the believers of former times who were persecuted as ‘Anabaptists’ and ‘heretics’. We have no occasion to be ashamed of our connection with these believers who sacrificed life and fortune for this truth. We do not thereby endorse the errors of any of them.
6. The Biblical Baptism signifies a public renunciation of the nominal and mass Christianity of our days, with its doings and objects.
7. Finally, Biblical Baptism signifies co-operation in the reintroduction of Biblical Church Order and discipline, for which each individual believer is in his measure responsible.”

Johannes Warns, *Original Christian Baptism*, 1913

THE SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM

Those only are proper subjects of baptism who repent of sin and believe in Christ. Repentance and faith are associated graces in the hearts of the regenerate, each of them implying the existence of the other. Sometimes one of them is particularly mentioned as a qualification for baptism, and sometimes the other. They manifest themselves by confession of sin; by profession of dependence on Christ, and subjection to His authority; and by holy obedience.

John the Baptist required repentance, with its appropriate fruits, in those whom he admitted to baptism. It has been denied that the rite which he administered was identical with Christian baptism; but, for our present purpose, nothing more is necessary than to satisfy ourselves that John did not require more spiritual qualifications for his baptism, than were required by Christ and His apostles. If he proclaimed repentance to be necessary because the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, it could not be less necessary after the Kingdom was established. That John did require repentance, as a qualification for baptism, the following Scriptures testify: *“Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand... and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins”* (Matthew 3:2, 6). *“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father”* (Matthew 3:8, 9).

During the personal ministry of Christ, He made and baptized disciples. *“There He tarried with them, and baptized”* (John 3:22); *“the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John”* (John 4:1). Those only were baptized by Christ, who were made disciples; and discipleship implies repentance and faith. The commission which Christ gave to His apostles connects faith and discipleship with baptism as qualifications for it: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be*

saved” (Mark 16:15-16); “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them*” (Matthew 28:19).

In executing the commission of Christ, the apostles and their fellow-labourers required repentance and faith as qualifications for baptism. Several passages in the Acts of the Apostles clearly indicate this: “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized*” (Acts 2:38, 41); “*when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*” (Acts 8:12); “*and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized*” (Acts 18:8). In the Epistles of the New Testament, baptism is mentioned in such connections as prove that all the baptized were believers in Christ: “*Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through...faith*” (Colossians 2:12); “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:26-27). All these quotations from Scripture harmonise perfectly with each other, and incontrovertibly establish the truth that repentance and faith are necessary qualifications for baptism.

The place that baptism holds in the Commission indicates its use. The apostles were sent to make disciples, and to teach them to observe all the Saviour’s commands; but an intermediate act is enjoined, the act of baptizing them. In order to make disciples they were commanded, “Go, preach the gospel to every creature”. When the proclamation of the good news attracted the attention of men, and by the divine blessing so affected their hearts, that they became desirous to follow Christ, they were taught to observe His commandments, and first to be baptized. This ceremony was manifestly designed to be the initiation into the prescribed service; and every disciple of Christ who wishes to walk in the ways of the Lord, meets this duty at the entrance of his course.

J. L. Dagg (1794 – 1884)

Beside the Gaza Road

The Biblical Pattern Demonstrated

On the important subject of baptism, the Word of God is extremely thorough and direct, in order that there should be no question or doubt pertaining to this fundamental Christian ordinance. It says something about the “*deceitfulness of sin*”, and the “*imagination of man’s heart*” that any alternative to the plain Biblical injunction should ever have arisen. Not only does Scripture show the origins of Believer’s Baptism (cf Mark 1:4-5, 11:30), its uniqueness (cf Ephesians 4:5), perpetuity (cf Matthew 28:19-20), and theological significance (cf Romans 6:3-6), but it also furnishes numerous practical examples of the ordinance in action. Throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit has inspired many accounts of baptism being performed, so that every discerning reader may observe the God-appointed pattern. The first and most significant of these real-life cases pertains to the Lord Himself: “*Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan*” (Mark 1:9). He suffered it to be so, “*leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21).

Proceeding through the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles is then reached – in which is seen the foundation of the New Testament Church. It is here that the majority of baptismal records are found. One of particular note is contained in the eighth chapter, and forms the basis for this article.

The Men

Two main characters are introduced to the stage of Biblical history at this point. One is Philip – not the apostle of that name, but the Philip referred to in Acts 6:5 who was one of the seven deacons originally appointed in the Jerusalem Church, described as “*men of*

honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). His office there was short-lived, and before long he witnessed the trial and martyrdom of his fellow-deacon, Stephen, *“and at that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria”* (Acts 8:1). Yet in the providence of God, this forced relocation proved to be the means of further usefulness and spiritual blessing. *“They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake”* (Acts 8:4-6). In the Samaritan towns and villages Philip found, as the Lord before described, *“fields...white already to harvest”* (John 4:35), and the gospel knew great success: *“when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12).

Then at the very height of this revival, an inexplicable and contrary directive was received: *“the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert”* (Acts 8:26). This instruction not only defied human logic and explanation; it also involved leaving the happy atmosphere of Samaria, running the gauntlet of antagonistic Jerusalem, that centre of persecution, hazarding one’s life beside a lonely highway, and all without intimation of the reason or promised outcome. Yet to Philip’s lasting credit, it is recorded *“And he arose and went”*.

The sovereign purposes of God may often involve bringing His people into times of barrenness, or places of isolation and loneliness. Seasons of prosperity may suddenly give way to hardship and trial, when the saints are caused to cry in fear and uncertainty, *“this is a desert place”* (Mark 6:35). The lesson

contained in Philip's example is for continued faith and unswerving obedience in every circumstance; for who can tell what the secret will of God might be, or the ultimate objective of His Divine dealings? A tortuous path may lead to the recovery of one lost sheep. Therefore, as the hymnwriter enjoins:

“When we cannot see our way
Let us trust and still obey;
He who bids us onward go
Cannot fail the way to show.”

The other key figure in this narrative is an Ethiopian Eunuch – a man whose high office corresponds in modern parlance to that of ‘Lord Chamberlain’, or ‘Chancellor of the Exchequer’ – a statesman of considerable standing. His nationality is of some importance, for although a proselyte to Judaism, the racially prejudiced Hebrews would not have readily accepted such a man. The dark-skinned Cushites were regarded as a suitable type for the permanence and inescapability of sin (cf Jeremiah 13:23), and the Pharisees were much offended to be unfavourably compared with “*the Queen of the South*” (Matthew 12:42).

That this Ethiopian man of all people, should be one of the New Testament's earliest recorded converts and candidates for baptism, teaches several things. It is a reminder that the Kingdom of God transcends all national boundaries, and knows nothing of race, colour, creed or ethnicity. There is no nation on earth which can claim any priority or advantage in the matter of salvation, nor is any place disqualified from the saving grace of God. Where sovereign election is concerned, “*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all*” (Colossians 3:11). Those who are brought into the Church are at once delivered from any categorisation which this present evil world enforced upon them. Just as natural birth dictates an individual's natural citizenship and country of origin, so new

birth confers a spiritual citizenship. The believer is henceforth constituted a member of the “*better country, that is, an heavenly*”. The man whom Philip met on the road was an Ethiopian – the man he left beside the baptismal pool was a Christian, who happened to reside in Ethiopia. They were “*no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*” (Ephesians 2:19).

The Ministry

The order of events, and means by which the Ethiopian man came to the point of baptism should be carefully noted. It was a process that did not begin upon the Gaza road, nor with the arrival of Philip, but can be traced much further back, to God Himself. By a remarkable providence, this high-ranking foreign official had begun to learn of ‘things spiritual’. Through circumstances not recorded in Scripture, this unlikeliest of men had been acquainted with a measure of truth concerning the God of Israel. Though elementary and imperfect, that knowledge was of such effect that he “*had come to Jerusalem for to worship*” (Acts 8:27). There can be no doubt, or denying of the fact that God was at work, and already by the ministration of His Holy Spirit had begun to convict and quicken the Ethiopian’s heart. Salvation is of the Lord, and every work of grace begins at His throne of grace.

It is further told concerning this man that he “*sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet*” (Acts 8:28). By a further Divine intervention, the Ethiopian came into possession of a portion of the written word of God. Long before Philip appeared beside his vehicle, he was blessed through the faithfulness of another of the Lord’s servants, namely Isaiah, who, some seven centuries previously had dutifully declared and recorded God’s timeless revelations to man. Isaiah experienced very little ‘success’ during his lifetime, and was largely ignored and rejected (cf Isaiah 6:9-12), yet it was he who recorded the Lord’s statement: “*So shall My word*

be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). One of those purposes did not come to fruition until the first Century A.D. in the chariot of the Ethiopia Chancellor. Nevertheless, the promise found a fulfilment there, and a passage of Isaiah’s prophecy became instrumental in salvation. The power and effect of God’s Word must never be underestimated, for *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God ” (Romans 10:17).*

Yet there was to be a further link in the chain of God’s dealings with this individual. The same Scripture asks: *“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:14-15).* Owing to the ‘blindness of the mind’ that comes with the sinful nature, the Ethiopian was unable to penetrate the language of Isaiah’s prophecy, for such things are spiritually discerned. It was therefore at this juncture that God caused the chariot to pass the point on the road where Philip waited, wondering to what end he had been sent there. Hearing the recognisable phrases of the prophet read aloud by the traveller, he entered first into conversation, and then into the carriage. *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35).*

Philip was unafraid and unashamed to begin immediately to preach unto his hearer the doctrine of salvation. He did not adopt the policies of today’s so-called evangelists and communicators, who might advocate first ‘building up a relationship’ by means of idle chatter, or recommend a simpler portion of the Bible, or resort to insubstantial worldly platitudes. No, he began at the exact place

where the Ethiopian read – a deep and very involved Old Testament portion, and preached authoritatively upon it. The nature and detail of that sermon is not recorded, although its content might be guessed at. Having established the identity of the subject to be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, such wonderful themes as sacrifice, substitution, atonement, propitiation and justification could be opened up and expounded. Yet in no way was this presented in a detached or impersonal manner, merely to excite the Ethiopian’s intellect. It is evident that Philip made very pertinent application, showing that Christ, and His sacrifice alone are the only means of reconciliation with God and that personal faith and identification with Him is the sole means of salvation.

Such a clear presentation of the gospel made a powerful impression upon the mind of the Ethiopian. He believed to the saving of the soul, and in consequence, earnestly desired to publicise his state of heart, and be demonstrably united to Christ. Philip had already explained a way whereby both objects might be achieved: Baptism.

The Method

What was the manner of the Ethiopian’s baptism, and how was it conducted? These details are all afforded in the Biblical account. Firstly, it was consciously and intelligently requested by the individual in question: “*the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized*” (Acts 8:36). To baptize those who are incapable of knowing, or understanding what is taking place makes a mockery of the Biblical ordinance, and is a travesty of the Truth. Upon serious consideration of all that he had heard and learned, the eunuch asked whether any practical or theological objection stood between him and baptism. Philip gives a timeless answer – and this is the criterion and stipulation which still applies to every candidate, and every baptism: “*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*” (Acts 8:37). Let textual critics deny the authenticity of these words if they dare; let the modern versions

perniciously excise them; let aberrant denominations wilfully ignore them – the truth stands! Baptism is for believers, and must be preceded by a profession of faith. The Scripture states: “*if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” (Romans 10:9-10). It was such a confession that Philip desired to hear from the lips of his companion, such a testimony as would validate and establish beyond doubt the genuineness of his conversion, and so pave the way to the baptismal pool. This was, and remains the essential prerequisite. “*And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:37).

The holy ground of baptism demands to be approached with godly fear. It is an ordinance sacred and Divine, which must be rightly observed. It would be to great advantage if every baptism, or so-called baptism, every conductor of it, every candidate, came to this unspeakably solemn rite with the question: “what doth hinder me to be baptized?” For there are certain legitimate and Biblical objections – principally the absence of sensible, personal faith. If the candidate cannot give a true testimony to faith, either through insincerity, ignorance, or indeed the unconsciousness of infancy, then they are disqualified from the ordinance.

Having passed the vital test, the Ethiopian Eunuch was baptized. What was the mode of his baptism? The Scripture makes it absolutely clear that the method was by the total immersion of the body in water. This is evidenced by several details. Here was a man making a long journey by a desert route from the Middle East to Africa. He would doubtless have travelled with a charioteer and other necessary servants. To suggest that they went on their way with nothing to drink, and no vessels of water in the whole company, is as preposterous as it is wrong. If ‘baptism’ could be

satisfactorily administered by the sprinkling or effusion of a little water, then Philip might have readily performed it en route – for the means were available to hand. Yet the Scripture expressly tells that they all stopped by an oasis at the roadside – a body of water sufficiently large to be observed from a moving chariot. “*And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him*” (Acts 8:38). Why was it necessary to come to a halt at this pool, and for the two men to bodily walk down into it? On the same question, why did John the Baptist station himself near the River Jordan? The answer is self evident: “*And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were baptized*” (John 3:23). The proper conduct of baptism requires ‘much water’. The mode of baptism, prescribed by God, exemplified by Jesus Christ, perpetuated by His disciples and described in numerous Biblical accounts is the total immersion of men and women upon profession of faith. There is no other way.

“*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...*” and the greatest benefit to be derived from an inspired historical record such as this is to put its principles wholeheartedly into practice and to faithfully follow the godly example which it affords.

R. J. Steward

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

6th & 7th June 2009 D.V.

Saturday 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.00 p.m.

Lord's Day 10.45 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

Preacher: Dr. David Allen
(Stowmarket)

a cordial invitation is extended to all

Editorial

What are the origins of Believer's Baptism? This is a subject of much controversy in itself, with some regarding it as a relatively modern phenomenon, others ascribing its introduction to the Early Church, or to the Apostles, or to John the Baptist; whilst others would trace it back to the Jews, and have it to be a successor to Levitical ablutions and ceremonial washing. There really is no need for any such debate or doubt, because this is a question that Christ Himself has categorically answered. On one occasion He was confronted by the Pharisees (that sect whose religious traditions had usurped the Word of God) and asked from whence His authority came. "*And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John [i.e. – true and biblical baptism upon repentance and faith], whence was it? from heaven, or of men?*" (Matthew 21:25). This was a rhetorical question, in which the answer was inherently contained. With the benefit of spiritual discernment, it is evident that the Lord's mandate and power in preaching was 'from above'. But the Saviour's argument here has other implications. As surely as Christ's authority was Divine in its source, so too is the ordinance of Believer's Baptism. To deny one, is to deny the other.

Having reached such a conclusion, and recognised the true origin of this practice, there are serious consequences; for "*If we shall say, From heaven; He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe...?*" Since this heavenly ordinance proceeds from the mind and will of God, and has been revealed directly by Him unto His people, obedience is imperative. His Word must be believed, and His commands must be followed. There can be no mitigation, or excuse. How shall "*we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven?*" (Hebrews 12:25).

What then can be said for that other practice which misappropriates the name of ‘baptism’ – the sprinkling of infants? It is not to be found anywhere in the Old or New Testaments, but secular and ecclesiastical history declares its lineage – through Anglicanism and Romanism, back to Rome’s godless and heathen predecessors. Consider the basic premise of this unbiblical ritual: that an infant may be admitted into the Church of God by the application of water, or by virtue of their parents’ faith. Here is a teaching that blatantly defies the Word of God, and contradicts its most fundamental tenets. If certain children from birth have ‘the seed of faith’, or possess any kind of spiritual advantage, then the doctrine of Total Depravity has ceased to be true. If the Kingdom of God can be augmented merely by human procreation, or the ‘christening’ of newborns, then Election is no longer Unconditional, Redemption is not Particular, salvation has ceased to be ‘by grace, through faith’, and is henceforth ‘of the will of man’.

One other, often overlooked consequence of the erroneous teaching of paedobaptism is the false assurance that has thereby been given to countless multitudes of sinners. Often in conversation one meets those who, by reason of a rite performed upon them in infancy, consider themselves to be ‘safe’, and a member of ‘the Church’. The sprinkling of water has effectively stopped their ears to the preaching of truth, and left them in perpetual ignorance of the real way of salvation. The Word of God has been rendered ineffectual through these man-made traditions (cf Mark 7:13). This is a matter of grievous solemnity. To teach that an individual can be saved by anything other than the conscious exercise of personal faith, or to suggest that any alternative process may grant an entrance into the Church of God, is to preach ‘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”* (Galatians 1:7-8).