

On the Baptism of Households

by John Nelson Darby

Baptism is a symbol of faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, and it is a way of bringing people into a relationship with God as part of the second man.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6, John 20:17, Acts 22:16, Romans 5:12, Romans 6:2-3, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 2:13, Hebrews 11:6, 1 Peter 3:20-22

Topics: "Baptism", "Faith and Salvation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of baptism in relation to the death of Christ and its implications for households. He explains that baptism symbolizes the acceptance of God's judgment on the first man, allowing believers to identify with Christ's death and resurrection. Darby argues that through faith, parents can claim the salvation of their children, as baptism serves as a public acknowledgment of this belief. He highlights the importance of training children in the ways of the Lord, recognizing their standing in Christ's death. Ultimately, Darby calls for a return to the biblical understanding of baptism amidst the confusion in the Church today.

Transcript

Some remarks on the work of the Lord Jesus, with especial reference to the world in which we now live.

Romans 5:12. To Adam it was said, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die," etc., and death has been the common lot of all from that day to this. In the garden there was no barrier between God and man till sin came in, after it there was no way of approach or return to God but through death. This is the way God has been teaching to all his servants through the Scriptures. Adam is clothed with skins, and that brings the lamb (Ed.: Abel's sacrifice.) and Noah, Abraham, Moses - all had to learn the same truth.

What means the Paschal Lamb and what means the elaborate Jewish ritual but that if God is to have a redeemed people on a cursed earth it must be on the ground of death? That if God is to have any dealing with sinful man so as to bring a man into outward relationship with Himself, it could only be through the slain lamb - a type of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." How little was known of the import of all these things! The better thing has been reserved for us, and in the light of the glorious gospel all becomes plain.

It is written (Heb. 2:13), "These all died in faith," etc., and (2 Cor. 1:20), "All the promises of God," etc. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is seen to be on man's side the object of faith and on God's side the only

ground on which He could have dealings with sinners (He being the Holy God must of necessity witness against me). And from the past to the present moment he who comes to God must come in God's way. "How can a man be just with God?" "If one died for all, then were all dead," "In Thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." At the flood God had said, "The end of all flesh is come before me," and there was no alternative but judgment. Still man was not set aside, which took place on the Cross. Noah comes forth, and on the ground of the sacrifice God blessed him and made a covenant with him, and with all that came forth from the ark.

Afterwards the land is given and man in the flesh is put upon trial. How miserably he fails we need not here examine, but pass on to that which seals the doom of all men whether Jew or Gentile. The blessed Son of God appears, the light shining in the darkness; the Life where all was dead; the truth exposing all that was not of it. He is rejected of His own, the Jews. They deliver Him over to the Gentiles by whom He was condemned to death, and that cross set up on Calvary becomes the central point of human history. Then and there sin, alias the flesh, or first man, with all that belonged to him, was judged by God and forever set aside.

This blessed truth accomplished by One, on whom God had His eye from all eternity, is unfolded to us in His word. There it is we learn that it is in the death of His Son God has been glorified about sin, etc. (2 Cor. 5:21). When the Lord Jesus came forth from the grave whither He had gone for sin, He says to His own, "I ascend to My Father," etc. (John 20.) - the result of His death and resurrection. Then the message goes forth into the world, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," etc. Jesus is preached as the One risen from the dead, having annulled him that had the power of death, that is the devil. He had "tasted death for every man," and henceforth becomes the head of every man. The first man is forever judicially set aside; his trial is over, his judgment is passed. "Now is the judgment of this world," etc. (John 12:31). These solemn words were spoken by our Blessed Lord in view of His death, and if there is to be any blessing for any soul of man it must be through Him the risen One from among the dead.

This is the solemn but glorious testimony that God is now presenting to sinners. Jesus passed through death and is exalted to heaven's highest place; that He has borne all the judgment that was due to sin, having taken upon Himself every responsibility in which it was possible for man to come and to fail in: that upon His devoted head met all the wrath of God against sin - in brief, then, that the first man - sin - the flesh, has been perfectly judged in the death of Christ, forever set aside and put out of sight. Baptism is the expression of the acceptance of this judgment, the renunciation before God of the man, the confession that I had my due as man if God is to deal with me on the ground of what I am, death is my portion: for this was the portion of Christ when He was made sin, that henceforth I might live as in Christ, "the second man," who in grace died for me. So it is written, "The publicans justified God being baptized," etc. Now, to justify God is to condemn myself, but "the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptised," etc. A few in baptism gave up all hopes of blessing on the ground of their responsibility, acknowledged the failure of the nation, renounced all the claims they ever had, confessing their hopes of blessing to be in the One announced by John, "He that cometh after me." The Pharisees on the other hand were righteous, did not justify God: refused to be baptized, did not condemn themselves, and did reject the counsel of God. I adduce this simply to illustrate what Baptism means (that is the acceptance of the testimony raised) without going into the difference between John's and Christian baptism, save to note there is one. The moment a sinner believes in Christ he is accepted in Him, saved through faith in His name: but then this is a scene in which God has been outraged, the scene where sin has been reigning, the scene where Christ was made sin, in which He died unto sin. If I am to have part with Him down here I

must in figure go through death. I am baptized to His death in order to have part with Him down here, in whom alone is life. It is not that I have first to have part in His life in order to have part in his death, but, as in reality, so in type, I have part in his death in order to have part in His life.

Baptism never supposes life in the one baptized though it may be there, but it always supposes death. Thus Saul was in the condition that attached to him as a sinner with sins on him, though himself safe, when he was bidden to "arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). His sins were not washed away, that is to say, he was outwardly connected with the first man, until baptism to Christ, and as to himself as a man on the earth was not in a Christian state till after baptism. If life were implied in baptism, would it not have been written, "Arise, and be baptized, because your sins are washed away"? Again it is said, "Repent, and be baptized, for the remissions of sins," not "because your sins are remitted," which is the ground taken by those who refuse baptism for any but believers. "They that gladly received the word were baptized," and it was "for the remission of sins"; that is to say, they could not be acknowledged as outwardly free from sin until they had in type died in the waters of death, and waters of baptism (1 Peter 3:20, 22), "wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by waters!" etc.

Here are statements first that Noah was saved by water. He entered the ark before the flood and God shut him in, and he was as safe as God could make him; but no one could say he was yet saved, and the word says he was "saved by water; the like figure," etc. As the water was God's judgment by which the world was overwhelmed, Noah goes through it. He enters the ark in the old world, goes through the water, the judgment, and comes out in the new world. He could not be saved, but by going through. the waters of death through which he who accepted God's judgment is called to pass, and which "doth now save us." Noah could not be saved but by going through the judgment, he could not be brought to stand in the new world except through the flood; neither can we be brought into outward connection with the new man except we go through Christ's death in a figure. "The like figure now saves us." Then we are not saved outwardly without it. "Not the putting away the filth of the flesh," that is, not the outward washing which does make clean the outside of the cups, but that of which it is a type and unto which I am baptized, Christ's death, (Ed.: The resurrection of Christ was proof of the efficacy of His death.) which alone can give a good conscience before God, knowing that He has borne the judgment of sin in His death. Noah was saved, through faith in God's testimony, in the ark, the type of Christ, but he could not stand on new ground except through the flood. The Christian is likewise saved through faith in the blood, but he cannot stand in the judged world in connection with the second man except he likewise go through death in a figure.

This was exactly the condition of Israel in Egypt. They were under the shelter of the blood, but they did not get out of Egypt till they had crossed the Red Sea, in type the death of Christ, and the destruction of all enemies. They are safe, but not saved. It is the blood which shelters them from judgment, but they have to pass through the waters of death before they are seen as a delivered people. In like manner faith in the blood shelters me, but I am not delivered from Egypt till I have been through the Red Sea. True, I may be the Lord's, and may know that Christ has been through death for me, but this (Ed.: The Red Sea figure of Baptism.) has to do with my position on earth, not the going to heaven. We do learn in it that we have died with Christ, and therefore ought to be buried. (Ed.: This touches Colossians 2.) We do see that Christ has died to sin; but, on the contrary, I am baptized in order to die, and in type die. There the first man has been judicially ended since the cross, and I then and there own that truth in the type of death. It separates me, as the Red Sea did Israel, from Egypt, from all that to which Christ died. "How shall we, that are dead to sin," etc. (Rom. 6:2, 3). The question is raised of saints delivered from sin turning again to it, sinning that

grace may abound, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. How does the Spirit of God meet them? "If ye have been baptized to Christ, it was also to His death"; and what was the death but the judgment of God against sin? In baptism they had acknowledged this - the righteousness of that judgment borne for sin - had been baptized unto it, and were henceforth to walk in newness of life (see also Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:12). The death of Christ to which they had been baptized was that which separated them from all things - sin, the law, the flesh.

Believing, then, that the first man is entirely condemned and judicially ended in the death of Christ, baptism is faith's acceptance of this judgment that if God has given me children they are born not in connection with the second man, but in the nature of the first, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Believing that these children, though thus born in sin and in the nature of the first man, the ended man, are to be trained for God, brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (He who has attained that Lordship by death); it is the privilege of faith to reckon such as judicially ended, to start from the death of Christ, remembering what God thinks of that death, that it is either salvation or judgment, that in it is displayed the righteousness of God which is unto all but is only upon all which believe. "We are unto God a sweet savour," etc. (2 Cor. 2:10, 15). The cross of Christ has become that which accredits the holiness of God in the face of sin. We, as believers, are bound before God to present the death of Christ for the acceptance of our children as soon as they become responsible to receive it. But faith in me at the earliest moments lays hold of that death for my child, who is part of me, and for whom I am responsible to God.

When Israel passed through the Red Sea, a type of Christ's death, they having part in it on the principle of faith, those waters became "a wall unto them on the right hand and on the left," and they were the same waters of death that overwhelmed the Egyptians, who assayed to enter them, without faith and apart from Moses, the leader of Jehovah's people. In like manner faith sees that Christ dead and risen is preached to all, and is made the witness of God's holiness in opposition to sin: the ground of condemnation apart from faith. The question arises out of this. In what relation do children stand with regard to God? And secondly, in what relation do Christian parents stand with regard to God, and the children He has given them? It is here we recognize no standing for ourselves, but in the second man. The first standing has been swept away by the death of Christ, and it is equally true that our children's standing in the first man has been swept away also. As children they stand in virtue of Christ's death, "In heaven their angels," etc. Faith accepts this, and puts them in it in type, accepting it as God's righteousness which shall be to them either salvation or judgment. But blessed be God, it is not His will that any should perish. His word to the tailor was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house." His faith was to lay hold on the death of Christ not only for himself but also for all that belonged to him. God in response to his faith in Christ would apply the word to their conscience and would give them to accept for themselves what his faith had accepted for them, so they were baptized as his household. This was an absolute statement of God, and, if words have meaning, warrants me to claim the salvation of my house in answer to my faith in God. This too is His gift. Ephesians 2:8.

But I remember the first man is judged, that Christ risen is displayed as the righteousness of God before a guilty world, that the world lies under the judgment of God for the death of His Son: that every mouth is stopped: that all are under sin: that Baptism expresses nothing for myself as a believer which my faith may not lay hold of for my child who is part of me. When I remember that God warrants me to expect the salvation of my child: that by baptism one is brought out of the world that lieth under judgment into subjection to the faith of Christ ("the like figure whereunto baptism doth now save us," etc.), and that one is brought into the Church: that the death of Christ, and baptism the figure of it, is either salvation or

judgment to all those to whom Christ risen is displayed as the righteousness of God, then I joyfully accept in figure, and by faith for my child, for whom I am responsible to God, Christ's death for it.

I own if God deals with it according to what it is (or the first man), there is no hope. I own that the death of Christ has ended the first man, that in that death this child, as part of the first man, was judged. I own that all hope is in the second man. I submit it to Christ's death, which shall be of necessity either its salvation or its judgment. But, blessed be God, He encourages me to believe it shall not be judgment but salvation. He is not willing that any should perish. He has given me Christ for myself, and presents Christ for the acceptance of my children not to be their condemnation. He tells me to bring them up for Him "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." He tells me to "train up a child," etc. (Prov. 22:6). The little ones belong to Christ. He has redeemed them. He said, "Suffer little children," etc.

In baptism I acknowledge the right of Christ, which He has attained over it by death. "That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). That it is not to be brought up in the world and as of it, trusting that God may at some future time claim it for Himself, but trained for Him. Faith for it does renounce the world, the flesh, and the Devil, owns that all its education and training is to be as of one who belongs to Christ by virtue of His death. Faith reckons it to be dead to the world: therefore I cannot allow for my children in the world anything that I myself as a Christian may not have. Who are sufficient for these things? All their training should be for this end, that Christ has acquired a right over them when they are responsible. I, as responsible for them, acknowledge that right. This done in faith, will not God give them to know for themselves, not only the need of a Saviour, but will He not assuredly delight to give them Christ for their hearts. He who accepts Christ's death as the shelter from judgment, whether for himself or those God has given him, and then allows his children to grow up in the ways and the pleasures of the world because they are not converted, or is himself engrossed with them, is like what an Israelite would have been had he gone out of the door of his house before the morning. (Ed.: A reference to the night of the Passover.) "The life which I now live in the flesh," etc. We cannot afford to forget that the blood is on the lintel. The world is under judgment, everything is a question of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

If the word of God has told us to baptize children, that would have been something that anyone could have taken hold of without faith. "The word of God is perfect." He who penned it knew what Christendom would be, hence we see the wisdom of God in withholding anything that nature could have appropriated, or that would have appeared to give countenance to that which now exists - a baptized Christendom without faith. But if there is nothing about children being baptized there is something and very much about the baptism of households, not because they were believers - they may or may not have been - but because they were households. There is a principle running through Scripture from beginning to end, and one may do well to examine it. You ask: How is it that these things are not known? That godly men refuse to baptize any but believers? That there was much darkness and confusion about that which concerns the simplest child of God?

The Church as "the pillar and the ground of truth" has failed: departed from single-eyed allegiance to Christ: ceased to walk by faith: has fallen back upon nature to walk by sight. We are in the last days. The Church of God is in ruins. The truth has been hidden, covered over with the dust of centuries: but God has been graciously removing the dust, leading the saints back to the word and restoring to them the glorious truths therein. He has recovered to us the glorious truth of the Lord's coming; the heavenly calling of the saints; the new creation, the principle of the assembly, etc. Still the saints are trying to discover the truth about baptism through the dust and in the ruin fettered by all that has been said and done about it. Fearful

of regeneration, we have rushed to another extreme and, knowing it could never give life, have denied that it now saves. Beneath the dust, and apart from the ruin, the word of God is bright and luminous as ever. It reveals as we are able to bear it and in its practical application. This is a subject peculiarly for faith, giving present deliverance to the Christian and all that belongs to him. Therefore the enemy makes special efforts to keep it from the saints of God. "The just shall live by faith."

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