

It Is Written

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Can An Unbeliever Baptize One Becoming A Christian?

By Bobby L. Graham

Answer: As important as baptism is in Gods plan of salvation, it does seem to have little emphasis placed upon the person doing the baptizing. One can search the New Testament through and through without ever reading any particular stress on the person baptizing another. There are requirements/prerequisites applicable to the one being baptized in almost every passage relating to baptism, but there are no requirements/prerequisites clearly stated concerning the baptizer. How does one explain this absence of teaching in the New Testament?

When the Lord gave the Great Commission to His apostles near the end of His earthly work, He naturally included baptism in the work that they were to do when people were ready for baptism (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16). They were the ones directly involved in carrying out the Lord's orders and were thereby qualified to baptize others. Did he caution them about the kind of people who could do future baptizing? No!

On the day of Pentecost when the church began in Acts 2, who did the baptizing of the 3000? Someone suggests that apostles did, but how do you know they did it? The truth is that Luke does not tell us who baptized the 3000. On successive occasions when people were baptized in the Book of Acts, who did the baptizing? How do you know? The truth is that no one knows who baptized the thousands who became Christians in the early chapters, the Samaritans in chapter 8, Cornelius and his household in chapter 10, or even Saul of Tarsus in chapter 9. If it makes a difference who does the baptizing, why did the Lord not inform us of those baptizing the named individuals?

Someone suddenly exclaims, "Philip baptized the Ethiopian in chapter 8." Yes, he was the only one there to do it. Would this one instance of knowing the baptizer require a Christian to baptize a person? If it would, would it not also require that the one doing the teaching also do the baptizing? In other words, after one teaches another about Christ to the extent that the taught individual desires to be baptized, it would be wrong to allow another person, who did not participate in the teaching but was influential earlier in that person's life, to step in and baptize the person. If this is not so, would someone please point out why it is not correct reasoning. One cannot avoid the conclusion that the Bible simply does not emphasize who has the right to baptize another person.

Another problem arises when one insists that the baptizer be a Christian. This human requirement demands that the validity of one's baptism depends both upon the person baptizing him, as well as all of the persons who earlier baptized people in the chain of baptizers. This chain of baptizers must consist of Christians, faithful Christians, all the way back to the apostles of Jesus Christ. In other words, one could not know his baptism was valid unless he also knew the validity of the baptisms performed all the way back from him to the apostles. Since this is an impossibility, such insistence as we are examining places a cloud of suspicion or doubt over many baptisms, about which one has no information. Do you know absolutely that the person who baptized you was faithful to the Lord? What about the person who baptized that one? Take it all the way back as many times as baptisms took place. Were all baptizers faithful servants of the Lord? If even one was not faithful as judged by the Lord, then all subsequent baptisms in that line of baptisms were invalid or unscriptural, according to this line of reasoning.

I challenge all who insist upon the baptizer being a Christian (remember he must be a *faithful* Christian) to admit that they simply do not know about all who baptized someone in the line of baptisms culminating with theirs. In other words, when judged by your own standard, your baptism is not valid or scriptural. Why? You do not know about the person who baptized someone in that line of baptisms 100 years ago or 1000 years ago, do you? With your lack of qualification to baptize another, are not all of the baptisms performed by you called into question?

When the Bible sets forth a command, like the command for baptism, there are specific requirements surrounding the command, as well as expediencies, to be used in implementing the command. The specifics must be obeyed as they are stated (like who can be baptized, why the person should be baptized, and how the baptism is to be done); but the expediencies available in carrying out the command are optional (like the place for the baptism, the person doing the baptizing, and what other activities might accompany the baptism). Two problems can arise relative to baptizing a person: 1) loosing the specifics/mandates and 2) binding the expediencies available for baptism. If a person chooses either the loosing or the binding, he is wrong in doing so. When one requires the baptizer to be a Christian, he errs by elevating a human tradition to the level of divine law (Mk. 7:8-9).

There is no problem that this writer knows about in using a Christian to baptize another; in fact, in most instances, I would even recommend that such be done. On the other hand, there are rare situations in which no Christian is available. Would you recommend that the person postpone his baptism until one is available? I would not make such a recommendation, but rather suggest that the candidate for baptism find one willing to do the baptizing, so that all might be right then with God. I know of some Christians in Alabama church history who were baptized by individuals who did not believe baptism is necessary for the remission of sins. The one being baptized knew Biblical teaching along this line and believed it. He wanted to be baptized so fervently he sought out a Baptist preacher, who already believed in immersion, and asked him to baptize him that his sins might be forgiven. Should John Taylor have waited to be baptized until he met some Christians who were able to baptize him? I would not want to make such a faulty recommendation and risk the loss of souls because of it.

PASTORIZING PREACHERS

By Dan S. Shipley

The denominational concept of the preacher and his responsibility as set forth in a popular creed-book reads: "A pastor is a preacher who...is in charge of a station or circuit" (i.e., a church or group of churches, dss). Such a concept is not only unscriptural, it betrays a serious misunderstanding of the work of both pastor and preacher. The NT pictures the pastor (shepherd) as an overseer, elder, or bishop (Acts 20:17,28) who, by virtue of meeting certain God-given qualifications (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1), and, along with other such men, "tend the flock" which is among them, "exercising the oversight" thereof (1 Pet. 5:2), taking care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:5). The pastor may also be a preacher, as was Peter (1 Peter. 5:1), but the terms are not synonymous--and neither is their work.

The preacher, on the other hand, is a herald, a proclaimer of the word of God (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 4:2) and is instructed to "do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). The preacher has no spiritual oversight and is not a pastor by virtue of his preaching work. Most brethren understand this.

However, while the idea of evangelistic authority and oversight would be opposed by most brethren, it is not always so in practice. We, even if unwittingly, often encourage the pastorizing of preachers by putting them "in charge" of the local church. This problem is compounded, of course, when the preacher covets such a role - especially among brethren who are unwilling to assume responsibility. Many are content to let the preacher handle whatever needs handling--except, of course, his meeting schedule, vacation time, and his raises. Good elders can be an effective deterrent to the pastor system, but rubber-stamp elders who do little more than OK the preacher's decisions only promote the pastorizing process and demonstrate themselves as unqualified to serve as true pastors in the Lord's church.

Even among brethren who know the local preacher is not "in charge" of anything and is not to be called "our pastor," there persists certain subtle indications that the clergy concept remains. One is in our language. For instance, reference is often made to a preacher as "Brother" so-and-so (with a capital B!), or "our Minister" (with a capital M!), or even "THE Minister." We note that equally faithful but non-preaching brethren and ministers (servants) are not referred to thusly. In addition, some brethren feel that they have not been adequately prayed over unless the preacher does the praying. Others feel unvisited until the preacher comes calling. And, there are indications that some even feel less obligated to attend Bible classes and worship services when the preacher is out of town.

In pointing out the equality among believers, someone has said, "All men stand on level ground under the cross of Christ." That certainly includes the preacher. Even though he is engaged in one of the most important works on earth, he deserves no preferential treatment. To be treated as a brother is enough.