

• CONCERNING BAPTISM •

From the Beliefs & Perspectives of the AME Church

INTRODUCTION: As AME's we believe "*Baptism is the sign of regeneration of the new birth. It marks the beginning of the Christian life. Infants and children, as well as adults, should be baptized*"¹. In addition, we also believe that (a) the modes of baptism shall be sprinkling, pouring, or immersion; (b) Under no circumstances shall anyone be Re-Baptized (Re-Christian-Baptism). This is strictly prohibited by the church; *And*, (c) all peoples shall be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Let me begin by saying that Baptism has been a subject of great controversy since before Paul wrote to the church at Corinth [Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17], so let me make it clear that this document is not meant to put our doctrines, beliefs and perspectives ahead of any other Christian denominations. I do not wish to *debate* our doctrines and perspectives; I always try to be careful not to quarrel about tenants of the various Christian denominations [Read Romans 14:1; 2 Timothy 2:14, 23-24; James 4:1-2]. My personal desire is to show how the beliefs of the African Methodist Episcopal Church concerning Water Baptism stand against the Word of God. Not every dispute is addressed, especially the various arguments based primarily on the *language* of the King James Version of the Holy Bible, and the scriptures and commentary are not nearly exhaustive: I put just enough to satisfy me (though some will never agree with the offered perspectives no matter how much of an argument is presented. I, personally, can live with that). My hope is simply that the student of this document will understand *what* and *why* it is that we, as African Methodists, believe as we do... and not necessarily be converted to that belief. May the Lord continue to determine your steps [Proverbs 16:9]!

~ Pastor Wm Hale



- BAPTISM DEFINED: **Matthew 3:13-15; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12-15; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21**

Baptism takes on many biblical meanings: to “fulfill all righteousness” [Matthew 3:15], “for the forgiveness of your sins” [Acts 2:38], the “pledge of a good conscience toward God” [1 Peter 3:21], or the “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” [Titus 3:5]. All this we sum up by saying that baptism is a *sign*, an *outward expression*, of regeneration, the new spiritual renewal, or new birth, that is received through faith in Christ.

- BAPTISM MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: **Acts 2:37-41, 8:12-13, 8:36, 38, 9:17-18, 10:47-48, 16:14-15, 16:31-33, 18:8, 19:1-5, 22:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11**

Baptism, not only for the individual, but for whole families and households as well [Acts 16:15; 16:33], marks the beginning of our new life of faith and Christian lifestyle.

- INFANT/CHILD BAPTISM: **Joel 2:16; Matthew 18:5, 19:14, 15; Mark 9:37, 10:13-16; Acts 2:38-39, 16:15, 16:31, 33, 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16**

The old covenant was *revised*, not abolished [Read Matthew 5:17; Acts 3:25; Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:17-18], and the old covenant included infants and children [Read Genesis 17:12-13; Matthew 21:16; Acts 2:38-39]. Just as circumcision marked the Jewish child who would be raised according to that faith, so we also mark our Christian infants and children with the sign of spiritual circumcision, baptism [Read Colossians 2:11-12], as they will be raised according to the faith of Christ Jesus. Even in the early days of Christianity

¹ Summary of the 17th Article, as found in the Know Your Church Manual © 1965 by Andrew White

when adults were mostly being baptized, some family/household baptisms took place [Read Acts 16:15; 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16], which we may assume included infants and/or children. Whether those incidents included infants/children or not, the early Christian church would acknowledge infant/child baptism so that their Christian children could be marked just as the Jews were commanded to mark theirs, and therefore make them a part of the visible church on earth and raise them, according to, and as a part of, the faith [Read Matthew 18:5, 19:14; Mark 9:37, 10:13-16].

- **BAPTISM BY SPRINKLING: Exodus 24:8; Leviticus 8:11, 30, 14:7; Numbers 8:5-7, 19:13; Isaiah 52:15; Ezekiel 36:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2; Hebrews 9:19-21, 10:22; 1 Peter 1:2**

Biblically, sprinkling was the mode for purifying, consecrating, anointing, and ceremonial washing/cleansing.

- **BAPTISM BY POURING:**

Concerning pouring, let us begin this way: Much of the epistle of Hebrews contends for Jesus' priesthood [Hebrews chapters 5 thru 8], arguing both the necessity and reality of it. "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." [Hebrews 2:17]. It has been suggested that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist for the purpose of obtaining this priestly authority {John the Baptist was the son of a priest [Luke chapter 1], therefore, according to the law, John himself was a priest [Exodus 40:15], and therefore in a position to *anoint* Jesus into the priesthood}. This is first supported by Jesus, who when questioned by John the Baptist as to why he {John} should baptize Him, Jesus replied: "to fulfill all righteousness" [Matthew 3:15], suggesting that he was being baptized for a different reason other than why others came to John to be baptized {which was for the repentance of sins [Matthew 3, *specifically* Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3], which Jesus did not need because he was sinless [2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5]}, therefore the "righteousness" that Jesus needed to "fulfill" was that of the law {because Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it [Matthew 5:17]}, or more specifically, the priestly authority of the law to act and atone for the sins of the people, which only a priest could do [Leviticus chapters 4, 5, 14, 15, and 19; Numbers 6:11, 15:25, 15:28; 2 Chronicles 29:24; Hebrews 2:17, 5:1]. This is further supported in Matthew 21, where Jesus clears the temple [Matthew 21:12-17], and later his authority to do the things he has been doing is questioned by the priests [Matthew 21:23-32]. Jesus responds by asking, "John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" [Matthew 21:25]. Some have supposed that Jesus was defending his right to act with the authority of a priest, which was given to him by the baptism from John the Baptist. Hence the reason Jesus never started his ministry until *after* his baptism, because he needed his priestly authority before he could fulfill his purpose — to be sacrificed for the sins of all humankind [Hebrews chapter 7, *specifically* Hebrews 7:27]. It has, therefore, been suggested that Jesus was baptized by pouring, because pouring was the mode by which priests and leaders were anointed/consecrated: *Read* **Leviticus 8:12, 21:10; 1 Samuel 10:1; 2 Kings 9:3, 6.**

It has been said that water-baptism is a *symbol* of the baptism of the Holy Spirit; if so, we must take note that the *mode* of the Holy Spirit was often pouring: *Read* **Isaiah 32:15, 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17, 33, 10:45; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2; Colossians 2:12; Titus 3:5-6**

- **BAPTISM BY IMMERSION: Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12**

These references are interpreted by *some* to mean immersion, but it could be said that "buried" with Christ does not mean immersion because Jesus was not buried underground, as is western world thinking; but he was laid in a tomb {above ground, *within* the sepulcher or tomb [possibly a cave structure], over-top him [possibly signifying pouring?!?]}.

An actual incident of the immersion of a person can only be found in the 5th chapter of 2nd Kings, specifically 2 Kings 5:14; but Naaman, who "dipped" himself, was *not* a Jew. Elisha sent word to Naaman that he

should “wash” himself [2 Kings 5:10], which meant the act of ceremonial washing, whose mode was usually sprinkling or pouring [see scriptures for references and notes above pertaining the Sprinkling and Pouring], but Naaman misunderstood, not being a Jew, and “dipped” himself.

Also, concerning immersion, some like to quote the King James Version of John 3:23, where it says, “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized” and Matthew 3:16 where it says, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.” First, “*much water*” in John 3:23 does not justify immersion as John’s Mode of Baptism. “*Much water*” meant there was *plenty* of water. John baptized *a lot* of people; plenty of water, or “*much water*,” was necessary. Secondly, “*straightway*” in Matthew 3:16 does not refer to the mode in which Jesus was baptized; the greek word actually means “immediately” or “at once,” referring to the fact that *as soon as* the baptism was over, Jesus came out of the water. He was standing in the water, then after his baptism, he *immediately* came out of it. It speaks more to the fact that Water Baptism is but a part of the Christian life... the beginning; like an initiation, but after it’s done you have to get to work. Don’t linger in the water... you have a ministry and a purpose that must be carried out.

Lastly, the greek for *baptize* means “*to dip*”. This does not necessarily suggest immersion, because when the priests poured or sprinkled, they would first have to “dip” the cup or the hyssop or their hand, before the act of ceremonial washing, cleansing or baptism.

We say all of this not to invalidate immersion, if that is the mode the candidate for baptism truly wishes; but to make it *clear* that immersion is not necessary for salvation, as some would have us to believe, and not necessarily biblical.

- **RE-BAPTISM: Re-baptism is not indicated, or inferred, anywhere in Scripture.**

It could be asked: what is the necessity of re-water-baptism? Because if one does not have faith, water-baptism is insufficient to grant access into eternal life. It could also be asked: is water-baptism necessary for salvation? The answer may be, *ask the thief on the cross* [Read Luke 23:40-42], where was his water-baptism? But, baptism is a sacrament of the church, given to us by Christ, and a necessary expression of our faith in Christ. Some would say *baptism* is to the Christian, as *circumcision* was to the Jew [Read Colossians 2:11-14]; AND, scripture never recorded an incident of re-circumcision (ouch)!

- **IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON & HOLY SPIRIT: Matthew 28:19**

Though the book of Acts gives many examples of baptism in the name of Jesus alone, the church cannot set aside the words of Christ himself where he stated in what name we ought to baptize. Further, when one comes to an agreement with the Holy Trinity (One God, expressed in Three Persons), it is clear why Jesus commanded us to baptize in that name which is the *full* expression of the One God we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Scriptures quoted from the *New International Version of the Holy Bible*,
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