

'THE WAY FROM THE MANGER' ***(A Biblical Beginning for 'The Good Life')*** **Luke 2:21-38**

Baby Baptism – Rite or Wrong?

On occasion, parents of a newborn infant call and ask us to perform a baby baptism service. Usually they are from a Catholic or Reformed religious background that sees baptism as a religious rite that carries a grace imparting benefit for the baby. The Roman Catholic Church erroneously teaches that babies need to be baptized as soon as possible so they can have original sin washed away (salvation) by the action of a priest. Roman Catholic clergy employ a 'fear factor' (typical of RCC control methods of their people), teaching that an unbaptized baby's soul is in jeopardy of being lost forever. RCC uses the fear method to control the parents by indoctrinating them that they must raise the baby as a Roman Catholic in order to receive this sacrament (sacrament = grace is imparted to the baby by a RCC priest).

Reformed churches have maintained baby baptism from their pre-Reformation, Catholic origins, but have redefined the ritual. Reformed churches usually teach that it is important to baptize babies, not for salvation, but as a sign of the baby being born into the 'covenant family of God' (to Christian parents). They liken baby baptism to Old Testament circumcision of Jewish babies as a physical sign of being born into 'the covenant nation of Israel'. In biblical fact, both of these unbiblical reasons for baptizing babies have no foundation anywhere in Scripture and are weak excuses to keep up the erroneous sacrament invented by Roman Catholic popes of the past. In the Bible there is absolutely no teaching or example of ever baptizing any babies for any reason whatsoever. Why not?

First of all, there is a theological explanation to the Roman Catholic error – no sin is ever removed by a physical rite such as pouring water over the head of a baby or anyone else for that matter. Sin is only washed away by application of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ by God Himself (not a priest 'standing in' for Him) to the heart (not forehead) of a repentant believer in the finished work of Christ (*Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, etc.*). Although every human being is conceived in and born in sin (*Psalms 51:5, 58:3; Isaiah 48:8, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1-3, etc.*), responsibility to repent of this condition and seek remedy at the cross of Christ begins when a child is old enough to know that he or she is purposely choosing to rebel and refuse God's way of forgiveness in Christ. Although the age of understanding and accountability varies with each child, it is certain that a baby doesn't knowingly sin and resist the grace of God (see *Romans 1:18*). The erroneous teaching of Reformation theology about baptism as a 'covenant sign' for babies born to Christian parents has absolutely no biblical foundation and is simply continuance in a practice of the RCC which has never been biblically addressed and 'reformed' as it should have been long ago. Therefore Reformed or Covenant theology churches must 'allegorize' baptism with Old Testament symbolism to excuse their long-term failure to reform their teaching on baptism by New Testament Scripture. This departure from logical, literal interpretation of Scripture just to justify unreformed doctrines has led to their redefinition of baptism through reckless allegorizing treatment of God's Word. Nowhere in Scripture are believers commanded to take OT circumcision of Jewish baby boys and redefine it as 'baptism' of baby boys and girls of Christian parents. Not only is it unbiblical; it also creates a potential false sense of security in such children and their parents that somehow they are okay with the Lord because of this unnecessary physical ritual that can't possibly do anything spiritually for the soul, which is the real issue in redemption.

Believers' Baptism

Baptism (Greek word for '*immersion*' not pouring or dipping) is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ for all who have repented of sinful lifestyles and false religion to trust in Him, His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection for salvation (*Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38*). Biblical baptism doesn't save a person in refutation of the heretical RCC teaching (*1 Corinthians 1:14-17*). Biblical baptism is an initial outward sign of belonging to Christ, not that one belongs to a covenant family even prior believing (*Acts 8:36-38, 9:18, 10:48, 16:15, 16:33, 19:5*). The above verses do not include even a single baby baptism. Only by a prejudiced imagination and an extremely strained allegorical interpretation can someone insert baby baptism into the text. Baptism by immersion by a truly dedicated disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is an important ordinance (vital but not imparting grace) and test of obedience that all believers are expected to submit unto. Baptism by immersion is for all children who have clearly understood the gospel message and have sincerely turned with repentant hearts to Jesus Christ, asking Him to forgive them and be their personal Savior and Lord (*Romans 10:9-13*). Wise parents will earnestly pray for their children, proclaim the gospel in devotions, protect their souls from hardening through exposure to the world, provide a good model of the Christian life in the home, and involve them in a good Bible-teaching church so salvation and baptism can happen in the lives of their children in due time.

A Savior-Like Start for 2012 *(The Fundamentals of the Fruitful)*

Luke 2:21-38

Purification

(Severing Connection with 'The Flesh')

**Joseph & Mary
vs. 21-24**

"And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His Name was called JESUS, the Name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Although circumcision is the literal cutting away of extraneous skin from a newborn baby boy, Scripture is clear that God desired for it be an outward act that reflected an inner spiritual truth of a convert's heart (*Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:28; Colossians 2:11*). What are some 'extraneous fleshly' activities and relationships that newborn Christians must 'cut off' in order to be purer in heart for the Lord?

Presentation of a believer's whole being after salvation (*Romans 12:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 5:23*) no longer requires any OT sacrifice since Jesus, the Lamb of God, satisfied all those demands of the Law. But dedication of one's body as a living sacrifice is still the right thing to do for believers who want to excel for the Lord (*Phil. 1:10-11*). Share when you did this and what difference it makes in your life?

Presentation

(Securing Connection with 'The Fellowship')

**Simeon
vs. 25-35**

"And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel."

And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

People who have an extra special love for the Lord and enjoyment of Him have a high level of reverence and devotion. What about Simeon made him so vibrant in his connection with Christ? List other things about him that are a result of old Simeon's presentation of himself into the temple courts that day? How does the example of Simeon apply to Christians today?

Proclamation

(Sharing Connection with 'The Faithful')

**Anna
vs. 36-38**

"Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Anna was aged but not old because of her spiritual enthusiasm about the Lord. Her life, though not easy, was full of devotion and ministry for the Lord. What were the character qualities about her that kept her spiritually younger than her years? Does there seem to be a connection between a believer's lifestyle and longevity? What are your areas of faithful ministry and outreach that will keep you energized in 2012?