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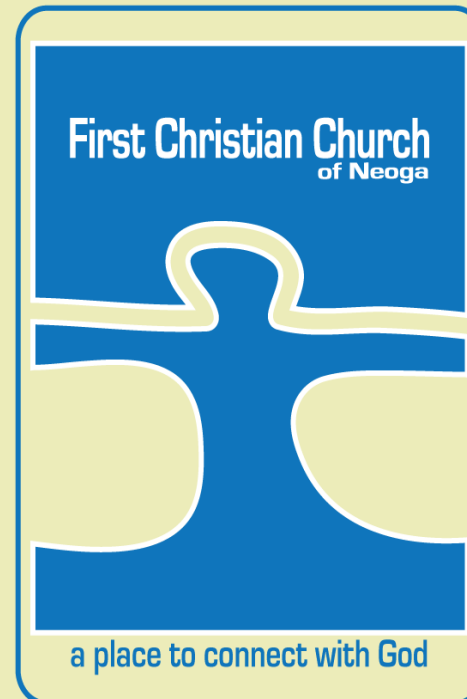
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Doctrine:

Immersion: Mode, Reason and Timing



A View on Water Baptism

1. Mode
2. Reason
3. Timing

The Mode, Reason and Timing of water baptism is critical in our understanding of this doctrine and also key in our discussion with others as we consider what the Bible states concerning this rite.

I. Mode

The mode of water baptism is rarely a debated topic in the Independent Christian Church but we do differ from many of the evangelical denominations and Catholicism. Baptism in the NT is, by definition of the actual Greek language, is immersion or dunking of one under water. There are many reasons for this belief.

- a. Actual meaning of language vs. other Greek usage for sprinkling and pouring
- b. Transliteration of the English word Baptism and why it came to be (i.e. motives of other interpretations)
- c. Context of water baptism passages in the NT of historical account
- d. Context of water baptism passage in the NT of theological account

II. Reason

The reason for water baptism is probably the most debated topic concerning this doctrine in the Independent Christian Church. There are many NT Scriptures which are torn apart and argued back and forth in today's evangelical churches and Catholicism expressing different reasons for water baptism. The reasons debated below include water baptism's role or lack of role in the salvation process, baptism as a means for witness to the unsaved world, and baptism as a means to enter into a local church membership. What is the reason for water baptism? Is it a sacrament? Despite the major amount of material afforded to one and many well thought out defenses on this subject, we will be looking at the traditional view of the Independent Christian Church. The purpose is to give each reader a good idea of where we have stood on this issue, it is not a torch we think everyone needs to essentially carry.*
*= The explanation of this statement will be given in more detail in the conclusion.

What is the reason for immersion in most traditional restoration Christian Churches? I was raised with Acts 2:38 and other scriptures engraved in my memory..."Peter replied, repent and be baptized (immersed) every one of you for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Mark 16:16, "Everyone who believes and is baptized (immersed) will be saved..." I Peter 3:21, "Baptism now saves you not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience." Romans 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Because of the inclusion of baptism upon conversion in the Scripture and its obvious symbolic meaning of death and resurrection, it was reasoned that baptism should be another act of faith in accepting Christ much like repentance and confession. It reasons from this that baptism thus must be essential to the acceptance of Christ much like confession and repentance and therefore is essential to salvation (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:11-15, I Peter 3:21). Alexander Campbell, a prolific leader in the Restoration Movement, wrote in The Christian System:
"We have been taught to regard immersion in water, into the name

of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as an act of the whole man, - body, soul and spirit. The soul of the intelligent subject is as fully immersed into the Lord Jesus, as his body is immersed in the water. His soul rises with the Lord Jesus, as his body rises out of the water; and into one spirit with all the family of God is he immersed. It is not like circumcising a Hebrew infant or proselytizing to Moses a Gentile adult. The candidate, believing in the person, mission and character of the Son of God, and willing to *submit* to him, immediately, upon recognizing him, hastens to be buried with the Lord, and to rise with him, not corporeally, but spiritually, with his whole soul. Reader, be admonished how you speak of bodily acts in obedience to divine institutions." (Campbell, p. 215)

The word "submit" describes well how the Independent Christian Church has viewed immersion. It is an act of submission to God through Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. Thus the act is not merely a bodily act of obedience but an act that is asking God to do His work.

However, it is my sole opinion that placing immersion into the salvation process (not as an act or step of salvation on man's part but God's) had led us into waters we never intended to wade into such as really confusing many who have seen immersion as a bodily act of obedience instigated by man. I understand the concern. Any teaching that espouses that man is adequate in any way to help himself to salvation is heresy. Immersion is not the work of man but the work of God through the Holy Spirit as he convicts a man's heart. (Acts 2:37)

Secondly, this teaching concerning the reason for immersion in the Independent Christian Church has led many to deducing salvation down to a formula. Another Restoration Movement leader by the name of Walter Scott, who is looked at today as one of the founders of the Disciples of Christ movement, described the basic teachings of salvation to a five step approach:

- Faith to change the heart.
- Repentance to change the life.
- Baptism to change the state.
- Remission of sins to cleanse the guilt.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit to make one a participant in the Divine Nature.

Whether Walter Scott intended this to become formulaic or not, I believe it has become a formula for many. Some have turned these teachings into the formula of the works of man to bring himself into a saving relationship with Christ. Moreover 1 plus 1 may be 2, but coming to the cross does not require math. Deducing the salvation given by God in his Son Jesus Christ to a humanistic formula is not only dangerous but anathema. Therefore in order for these traditional views of the Independent Christian Church to hold water they must refuse to focus on what man does but on the sole work of God in all of these such as faith, repentance, immersion, forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. One cannot just check these off of a To-Do list and expect salvation.

Many Independent Christian Churches hold to similar views on water baptism but do not make an adherence to these views as mandatory for membership. In fact, many churches on the modern landscape have chosen their words carefully when describing baptism due to sensitivity to the many people who have left denominational churches to join the Independent Christian Church. **The reason for the sensitivity should be embraced. Moreover, though there may be a variety of views concerning the reason for water baptism, we should be bold with teaching and following the biblical example concerning the timing of water baptism.**

Timing

The timing of immersion is a topic that is hardly addressed in most modern day churches. The subject is not necessarily even scoured in the Bible due to the lack of controversy I guess. It stands to reason that many churches that teach that Immersion is as merely an act of obedience for the believer, to be lax concerning any "baptismal service". Therefore there are many churches that practice group immersion days 2 times a year or something similar. Some churches even require new transfers from other Churches to wait on immersion until one had completed a "Baptism training class". There are

others who encourage convicted ones to wait on immersion in order for the ceremony to take place on a Sunday morning in front of the other congregants. There are many traditions but there are not any biblical examples of anyone in the early church waiting to immerse anyone. Look at these Scriptural examples:

- Acts 2:41 – 3,000 were immersed that day upon hearing the word at Pentecost
- Acts 8:11-13 – Philip teaches and it states that when they believed they were immersed
- Acts 8:36-38 – Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch – he believes and is immersed on the spot as they stop the chariot at water
- Acts 9:17-18 – the conversion of Saul, immediately after the scales fell from his eyes he was immersed
- Acts 10:48 – Luke uses a Greek word to mean immersion was to be done at that point
- Acts 16:15 – Lydia is baptized, didn't seem to take long because Paul was only there for a short time, she was immersed when God opened her heart
- Acts 16:33 – the Philippian jailer and family immersed in the middle of the night – the words, "at once" are used
- Acts 18:8 – Crispus and his household were immersed and other Corinthians were being immersed – the word that is used for immersed is a continuous action in the past – they didn't waste any time
- Acts 22:16 – Paul's words, "Why wait? Rise and be immersed!"

The timing as evidenced in the Scripture then is an immediate response upon conviction when one realizes that Jesus is the Son of God and chooses to submit to him. Purely from a timing point of view, we do not have biblical examples of waiting on immersion for any reason.