

# Baptism In Jesus Name

by Danny Brown

Oneness Pentecostals maintain that baptism must be by immersion using the formula "in Jesus name." That is, the one doing the baptizing must speak or call out the name of Jesus over the one being baptized in order for the baptism to be valid. Should he say, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" the baptism would be invalid.

## A Little History

"The first meeting of the United Pentecostal church as a new organization occurred on September 25, 1945, but the roots of its beginning go back to a Pentecostal camp meeting in 1913 located just outside Los Angeles, California. Although the UPC claims that 'a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit' came on January 1, 1901, it was not until the Arroyo Seco camp meeting that the distinctive 'oneness' identity began to take shape.

"During the camp meeting a man named R. E. McAlister spoke on the subject of water baptism and at the conclusion of his address he remarked that the apostles always baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and never with the words Father, Son, and Holy spirit. One of those who listened to McAlister, John G. Scheppe, spent the night in prayer and in the early morning hours ran through the camp shouting that God had revealed to him the truth on baptism in Jesus' name. Frank J. Ewart, one of those present in the camp meeting, later met and studied with McAlister and he became one of the early leaders of the oneness movement. He first publicly declared his position in a sermon on April 15, 1914. The UPC Manual states, "In the year 1914 came the revelation on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.'" – Alan E. Highers

On March 17, 1965 Mr. D. L. Welch, Pentecostal preacher, affirmed in debate with Elmer Moore, "The Scriptures teach that a baptismal formula must be said when one is baptized and the only name to use in the formula is the name of Jesus." On March 18, 1965 he denied the proposition, "The Scriptures do not teach that a baptismal formula must be said; and we are at liberty to use the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in scriptural statements when one is baptized."

The United Pentecostal Church International is today a very militant organization in promoting its views of "baptism only in the name of Jesus" and "only one person in the Godhead."

## **No Formula Bound**

The truth of the matter is there is no "baptismal formula" found or bound by the word of God. Formula is defined as: "A prescribed form; a prescribed form of words in which something is stated" - Webster's Dictionary. A Formula demands, "a set form of words in which something is defined, stated, or described, or which is prescribed by authority or custom to be used on some ceremonial occasion" - Oxford Dictionary. A formula does not vary, it must be the same every time. There is no direct statement, approved example or necessary inference of such being required by the gospel of Christ. The question is not whether baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ, it is. It is not the question whether we are baptized into Christ, we are. It is not a question of whether or not remission of sins is in the name of Jesus Christ, it is. The question under consideration is: Is it absolutely necessary for the one doing the baptizing to say a formula (a prescribed form of words such as: "I baptize you in the name of Jesus") over the one being baptized for baptism to be valid?

## **Four Passages**

There are four passages which mention baptism "in the name:'

Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Acts 8:16: "For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Acts 10:48: "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

Acts 19:5: "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

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These passages do not establish a set form or exact form of words to be said over the one being baptized. The phrase, "in the name of . . ." is a metaphor for "by the authority of" and not a reference to a baptismal formula. The difference in the wording reveals this. Note: In the four passages we find three different variations.

Acts 2:38: in the name of Jesus Christ

Acts 8:16: in the name of the Lord Jesus

Acts 10:48: in the name of the Lord

Acts 19:5: in the name of the Lord Jesus

The difference is even more striking in the original language (Greek) because of the variations in the prepositions used to show the relationship between the name and the baptismal act:

Acts 2:38: epi to onomati (literally, upon the name)

Acts 8:16: eis to onoma (into the name)

Acts 10:48 en to onomati (in the name)

Acts 19:5 eis to onoma (into the name)

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Here are four passages using three variations of "in the name." The very definition of "formula" demands a set form of words to be used. Surely we can see that there is no set form of words bound.

### **In The Name**

The phrase "in the name" is a metaphor. You cannot literally baptize someone in a name, since a "name" is just a word. One cannot be immersed in a word. It is a metaphor and not a literal use of the term. It means "by the authority."

"In the name of" is a phrase used by ambassadors. They go "in the name of," that is, by the authority of the country they represents. Everything they say and do is from authority granted to him. They act in the name of, that is, by the authority granted them by their country.

Similar language is found in Ester 8:8-11 where a decree written "in the name of the king" grants the Jews the right to defend themselves. The record further states that it "was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews . . . . he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus." Therefore, the commandments of Mordecai, to the Jews, were authorized by the king. Mordecai was not operating independently of the king; he had no authority but the king's authority. When Mordecai acted in the name of the king he was acting by the king's authority. So then to act (baptize in the name of Jesus Christ is to do it by his authority.

Doing a thing in one's name does not mean repeating a formula using that one's name. For example: "And David sent out ten young men, saying, 'Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet them in my name . . .'" (1 Sam. 25:5). "And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased." (1 Sam. 25:9) The young men of David went and in the name of David, that is, by the authority of David. So for them to act in the name of David was to act by his authority. Likewise to act in the name of Jesus Christ is to act by his authority.

Elmer Moore made this argument in his debate with D. L. Welch to show that the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ was simply the baptism authorized by Christ. "In Matt 28 Jesus said, 'All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you.' Mark's account says, 'Go preach the gospel. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.' I trust you are aware of this fact, these two accounts are referring to the same thing. These men are talking about the same thing. They're describing it with different language but they're talking about the same thing. It's the same account. In Lk. 24:46-48, the passage says repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in the name of Jesus Christ unto all the world beginning at Jerusalem. I submit to you that the term NAME in Lk. 24 is the equivalent of all authority in Matt. 28. Just like the matter of preaching the gospel is the equivalent of teaching in Matt. 28. So that you have in this commission outlined the fact that ALL authority has been given unto the Lord. Therefore, these things that are to be taught are to be taught in the name of the Lord.'

The word name is used when authority is under consideration: Eph 1:21 says, "Far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." There are five words used in this passage that carry basically the same meaning: principality, power, might, dominion and name. So the term name used here carries the meaning of authority.

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," (Col 2:17), Every religious act is to be done by the authority of Jesus Christ who has all authority and is head of the church. (Matt 28:18; Eph 1:22-23) Since baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is a religious act it is to be done by the authority of Christ. Thus baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is simply the baptism that is authorized by Christ.

"To be baptized resting on the name of Christ would include the idea of doing it on His authority. His name is an index to Him in His revealed character and work. To depend on Him as Jesus is to depend on Him as Savior (Matt 1:21). To depend on him as Christ means to depend on Him as the one anointed by God. He has been anointed to be our prophet, priest and king. In fact, in this very context Peter presented Christ as Lord or ruler. To be baptized resting on His name would include submission to His authority as ruler. Thus we do it by His authority. We are baptized because He is who He is, and in reliance upon Him." (J. D. Bales, Hub of the Bible, p 218-219)

## **Which Baptism**

We read of various baptisms in the New Testament:

The Baptism of John, Matt 3:6

The Baptism of Fire, Luke 3:16

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Mark 1:8

The Baptism for the Dead, 1 Cor 10:2

The Baptism authorized by Jesus Christ, Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38

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In point of fact, none of the expressions used in Acts, such as baptism in the name of Jesus Christ or baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, etc., are precise baptismal formulas telling us what to say. Instead, they are designations of the kind or which baptism is under consideration and are intended to distinguish it from other baptisms that were present in the first century.

This is especially revealed in Acts 18-19, where we read of Apollos, who (before he was taught the truth by Priscilla and Aquilla) knew only the baptism of John (18:25) While he was at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples who had not heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. Paul asked them, "Unto what then were ye baptized?" They answered, "Unto John's baptism." Two things are here revealed: 1) There is implied by way of contrast that there is another baptism besides the one in the name of John. 2) They had been baptized in the name of John, that is the baptism authorized by John. (Was John's name called over them when they were baptized in the name of John?) Upon further teaching that John's baptism was no longer valid, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. John's baptism means according to the baptism authorized by John and baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus means according to the baptism authorized by Jesus Christ. So the phrase in the name of the Lord Jesus was not a formula to be spoken at the time of baptism but a designation to distinguish Christ's baptism from John's. By the time the book of Ephesians was written (A.D. 64) there was and is now only one valid baptism, the one authorized by Christ. (Eph 4:5).

## **Baptism Requires**

There are a number of conditions that must be fulfilled (requirements) in order for baptism to be valid:

Proper Subject: A taught (Matt 28:19) believer (Mark 16:15-16) who has repented (Acts 2:38) and has confessed faith in Jesus (Acts 8:37).

Proper Element: Water (Acts 10:47)

Proper Mode: Immersion (Rom 6:3-4; Acts 8:38-39)

Proper Design: In order to Remission of Sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mk 16:16)

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We know that these are essential elements to baptism in Jesus Christ's name because we can turn to New Testament passages and read where they are bound.

### **Baptism Does Not Require**

There are some things that baptism in the name of Jesus Christ does not require. They are not bound. They may be a matter of choice, expediency, liberty or privilege. The baptism authorized by the Lord Jesus does not require:

A Particular Place: Baptism can be effected in any place where there is water enough to immerse an individual. It may be accomplished in a pond, river, creek, baptistery etc.

The Temperature of the water: Whether the water is warm, cold, hot or cool has no bearing on the validity of the baptism.

A Particular Person to do the Baptizing: The validity of baptism is not dependent on who does the baptizing,

A Particular Time: The time that the baptism takes place is of little consequence. It may be at a regular service of the church or it may be at any hour of the day on any day of the week.

Number of people present: In Acts 8 the only ones mentioned as being present are Phillip and the Eunuch. There may have been others not mentioned but witnesses to the baptism is not required.

Something to be said: The Inspired Word of God has not specified what is to be said at the time of baptizing. Nothing is required to be said and nothing forbids stating what is being done. This is a liberty, a matter incidental to the baptizing.

### **What to Do or What to Say?**

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:36-38). Those that were pricked in their heart by Peters sermon asked, "What shall we do? Peter answered telling them what to do. There is not a single hint in this passage or in any other passage which indicates that anyone was told what to say or that anything was to be said. Yes we are to baptize in the name of Jesus Christ, that is, by his authority. Peter told them what to do, not what to say.

Now let us go a step further and ask what was said when they were baptized on the day of Pentecost? What was said when Phillip baptized the Samaritans? We know what he did, what did he say? What was said when Cornelius and his house were baptized? What was said when those twelve men were baptized as recorded in Acts 19? We know what took place. They were baptized in the baptism authorized by the Lord Jesus in contrast to John's baptism. That's what they did. What did they say? In every instance (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:6) something was done, not said. They were baptized in the baptism that was authorized by Christ. They were not baptized in John's baptism, Holy Spirit baptism, the baptism of fire, or in anyone else's baptism. They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is what they did, what did they say?

### **Conclusion**

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (Col 3:17) It is wrong to bind where God has not bound.