

# GRACE GAZETTE

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*Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

*Hebrews 12:12-13*

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## REJOICING ON HIS WAY

*And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8:39*

The subject of water baptism has brought about the occasion of divisiveness since the early days of the church. The natural religiosity of man always seeks to place the emphasis of the purpose of this baptism on the wrong thing. Paul admonishes the Corinthians for making baptism the occasion for "heresy" (i.e. sectarianism) on the basis of who performed it. (see I Cor. 1:11-17)

This very notion is often the subject of various ecclesiastical orders who would go to great lengths to prove that it is valid only if performed by someone duly authorized by their "order", "sect", or "tradition". This idea has occasioned (or been occasioned by) the rise of "clerical orders" and elaborate ceremonies to differentiate those thus "authorized" from the rank and file who they then refer to as the "laity".

The propriety or validity of baptism, does not rest in the hands of its administrator but rather in the "conscience" of the one being "baptized" (i.e.; dipped or immersed). Nothing at all can be "conferred" to a believer by the hands of the one doing the immersing. Peter plainly says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1Pet 3:21) Apart from the operation of faith in the one being immersed, baptism is a mere sanctimonious exercise that is no different than any other religious activity of the flesh, which Paul aptly described as "dung". (see Phil.4:3-10)

Some sects have sought to make it an "initiation rite" into their "order", without which no fellowship can be enjoyed and certainly no privileges of "membership" in their august bastions of orthodoxy be conferred. Some false prophets have proposed that this rite can actually "wash the sins" of a man away. Peter clearly denounces this notion as he describes it, "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh". And some of the more popish sects of legalists, have tried to build a case for baptism in water as being an extension of the fleshly circumcision which was required under the Old Testament law. All of them view it as a sacerdotal exercise rather than a simple act of obedience wherein a man confesses his recognition of CHRIST as the risen SON of GOD.

The record of the Ethiopian Eunuch serves to illustrate the purpose and result of baptism as well as demonstrating how baptism is to be carried out. The Greek word which is translated (or actually transliterated) into English as "baptism", is "baptizo", which literally means to dip or immerse, to wash or whelm (i.e.; cover) with water. Only in the fertile imagination of men can this be contrived to mean "sprinkling", which it has been by many for convenience sake.

The manner in which Phillip baptized the Ethiopian proves the concept which the word conveys; "*they came to a certain water*" v.36 (i.e.; a body of water, likely a river or stream). I am sure that the Ethiopian was carrying water in his chariot since he was on a long journey and no convenience stores were on the route he selected. Phillip could have poured a little on his head or sprinkled some of that drinking water on him. Yet he "*commanded the chariot to stand still:*

and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.” (Acts 8:38) This seems rather clear that they were both in the water (even as John baptized in the same manner). They then came out of the water. Of this then we can be certain that both the baptizer and the baptized were in the water.

Now; the really important matter is not the baptizer, not the manner of the baptism, nor even the amount of water that was required; but rather, the confession of the one who was baptized. “*And the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*” (Acts 8:36-37) The approval of none else was either sought or needed.

Then we see the purpose of baptism, manifested in the resultant joy which was communicated to the Ethiopian as he went on his way rejoicing. This gift of GOD was applied to him as the SPIRIT confirmed in his mind both the work of the SAVIOR and his inclusion therein. Thus we see the answer of a good conscience toward GOD even as we read in Hebrews, “*But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:11-14)*

Phillip preached unto him only one message. “*Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*” (Acts 8:35) This message was confirmed unto him by the work of the SPIRIT of GOD and the act of baptism was but his glad confession that he believed those things which Phillip preached. Thus as he went on his journey, he was reminded both of that which CHRIST had done, and his own joyous confession of faith which the LORD was pleased to communicate to his soul as he contemplated his own baptism in the name of the LORD JESUS.

The purpose of the revelation of the gospel to the sons of GOD is not to continually remind them of their worthiness to be destroyed, but rather to apprise them of their freedom from condemnation that they have as a result of that which CHRIST has performed in their behalf. Though the work of the SPIRIT is to convince men of sin and judgment, it is also HIS crowning work to convince them of the RIGHTEOUSNESS of GOD in JESUS CHRIST, imputed unto them, so that they stand perfectly justified and accepted in the BELOVED.

It is not in the power of men to manifest this joy in themselves, but it seems odd that a man could indeed experience the gift of faith given by the SPIRIT and yet be totally lacking in the joy and rejoicing of the operation of faith as HE works in us both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure. Is HE not our COMFORTER? Is it not HIS purpose to give unto HIS little children, the kingdom of GOD? Did HE not bear our griefs and carry our sorrows? Has HE not taken away our sin as far as the east is from the west?

Surely it is so. And thus the Ethiopian who could not change his skin, nonetheless was given a robe of RIGHTEOUSNESS with which to cover his blackness, and a new heart to rejoice in the mercy of GOD manifested to him in the revelation of the gospel, sealed to his understanding by a confession of faith, demonstrated in his willing submission to the waters of baptism.

Let all of those who believe in the name of the ETERNAL SON of GOD, so testify. “*For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” (Rom 6:5-11) mam