

WHAT NAME SHOULD BE USED IN CHRISTIAN BAPTISM?

Should the repentant Christian be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ only or should baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be followed? What should be believed and what difference does it make if any?

The controversy arises when the scripture in Matthew 28:19,20 is used as the Biblical basis for Christian baptism. The verses state: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Trinitarian Concepts

These verses of scripture are used to support a Trinitarian concept of God which most trinitarians use to support their beliefs. However, commentators doubt the authenticity of these verses. The following extracts from Bible commentaries and dictionaries are a few of the comments made about Matthew 28:19.

Peakes Commentary on the Bible: "This mission is described in the language of the church and most commentators doubt that the Trinitarian formula was original at this point in Mt.'s Gospel, since the NT elsewhere does not know of such a formula and describes baptism as being performed in the name of the Lord Jesus (e.g. Acts 2:38; 8:16, etc.)."

The New Bible Commentary Revised: '19 Make disciples of all nations: the universal authority of the Lord leads to the universal mission of the church. Here is the authority for Christian baptism. It would not have been likely that it would have been practised so early after Pentecost (see Acts 2:38-41) if it had not been commanded by Jesus. It was administered 'in the name of Jesus' (Acts 2:38; 8:16, etc.), the name indicating ownership. In due course it came to be administered in the name of the Trinity. The reference to the Trinity here may not be intended as a baptismal formula but as a theological description of the meaning of the sacrament."

A New Standard Bible Dictionary: "As to the original form of the Baptismal Confession (the NT shows no trace of a baptismal Formula used by the baptiser, whose part is that of a mere minister and witness), it was at first apparently only 'Jesus is the Messiah' or 'the Lord'.

When exactly the Trinitarian form arose we do not know, the date of Mt 28:19, Did 7, being uncertain."

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: "There is, however, grave doubt whether they may be regarded as ipsissima verba of Jesus. The evidence of Acts 2:38; 10:48 (c.f. 8:16; 19:5), supported by Gal 3:27; Rom 6:3, suggests that baptism in early Christianity was administered, not in the threefold name, but "in the name of Jesus Christ" or "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: "Some scholars thus doubt the accuracy of the quotation in Matthew and suggests that it reflects a tradition formed by a merging of

the idea of spiritual baptism (as in Acts 1:5), early baptismal rites (as in Acts 8:16), and reports of Pentecostalism after such rites (as in Acts 19:5-6)."

The authority for baptism is not given in Matthew 28:19, but rather this verse reflects the mission of the church to make disciples of all the nations. The accuracy of this scripture has been questioned. Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion asserts that baptism had always been in the name of Jesus until the time of Justin Martyr when the Trinitarian formula had been used.

The Insertion Into Matthew 28:19

There is further evidence to suggest that "baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is a corruption of the original "in My name". In the Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius quotes the passage as: "Go and make all nations disciples in my name, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." In the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew by Shem Tob the passage reads: "Go and teach them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever."

It is clear that the baptismal formula does not appear in these texts and would seem to be an insertion in order to support the doctrine of the Trinity. That ultimate expression of faith in professing Christians is manifested in the form of the Trinitarian baptism.

Wilhelm Bousset writes in *Kurios Christos*: "... it is still essentially a baptism in the name of Jesus."

F C Conybeare wrote: "In the course of my reading I have been able to substantiate these doubts of the authenticity of the text of Matthew 28:19 by adducing patristic evidence against it so weighty that in future the most conservative of divines will shrink from resting on it any dogmatic fabric at all while the most enlightened will discard it as completely as they have its fellow text of the Three Witnesses [1 John 5:7]."

and "... of any other form of text [Eusebius] had never heard until he had visited Constantinople and attended the Council of Nice" (Hibbert Journal 1902).

In Black's Bible Dictionary on Matthew 28:19 he writes: "The Trinitarian formula was a late addition by some reverent Christian mind."

Furthermore, the Trinitarian Dr Peake (Commentary): "The command to baptise into the threefold name is a late doctrinal expansion."

G. R. Beesley-Murray stated: "There is not one example in the whole New Testament literature of a baptism taking place in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

RC Jerusalem Bible (1966) states: "It may be that this formula ... is a reflection of the liturgical usage established later in the primitive community. It will be remembered that Acts speaks of baptising in the name of Jesus."

The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics writes on the subject: "The facts are, in summary, that Eusebius quotes Matt. 28:19 twenty-one times, either omitting

everything between 'nations' and 'teaching,' or in the form 'make disciples of all nations in my name.' The latter being more frequent."

Dean Stanley (Christian Institutions) wrote: "Doubtless the more comprehensive form in which baptism is now everywhere administered in the threefold name ... soon superseded the simpler form of that in the name of the Lord Jesus only."

In the Outline of the Theology of the New Testament, Hans Conzelmann wrote on page 49: "The oldest baptismal formula has one member [ie Jesus]."

The International Biblical Commentary: "This is the only occurrence of the formula from the first century ... Elsewhere baptism is said to be 'in the name of Jesus' (Acts 8:16; 19:5)".

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia: "Matthew 28:19 in particular only canonizes a later ecclesiastical situation, that its universalism is contrary to the facts of early Christian history, and its Trinitarian formula is foreign to the mouth of Jesus."

The Expositors' Bible Commentary: "Many deny the authenticity of this Trinitarian formula, however not on the basis of doubtful reconstructions of the development of doctrine, but on the basis of the fact that the only evidence we have of actual Christian baptism indicates a consistent monadic formula-baptism in Jesus's name".

The Change in the Second Century

The Britannica Encyclopaedia admits that baptism was changed from the name of Jesus to words Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the 2nd Century. This is confirmed by the Canney Encyclopaedia of Religion that admits that the early church baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus until the second century.

Wilhelm Bousset states: "... The testimony for the wide distribution of the simple baptismal formula down into the second century is so overwhelming that even in Matthew 28:19, the Trinitarian formula was only later inserted."

The primary source of a different baptismal formula appeared in the writings of Justin Martyr who wrote in 140 AD: "For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost, they then received the washing with water." However, history does not clearly define which person first introduced the Trinitarian baptismal formula. The Catholic Encyclopaedia, volume 2 on page 435 admits that it was the Roman Catholic church which made the change to the Trinitarian baptismal formula.

During the second century baptism in Jesus name had been challenged by trinitarians and they condemned those who did not baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the third century as heretics. At one time the trinitarians demanded individuals who desired to rejoin the church to be rebaptised with the Trinitarian formula. It is interesting to note that Tertullian wrote that Christians are to be immersed three times into the three persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

During the time of Tertullian, the majority of the believers professed in the one true God and rejected the plurality of gods. He wrote: "They are constantly throwing out against us that we are preachers of two gods and three gods, while they take to themselves pre-eminently the credit of being worshipers of the One God."

In 225-256 A.D. Pope Stephen of Rome addressed the issue of baptism in Jesus name verses the Trinitarian formula. He allowed those who baptised in Jesus name to re-enter the church without being re-baptised using the Trinitarian formula. It had been considered by church historians that Pope Stephen of Rome recognised baptism in Jesus name. Joseph Hefele writes in a History of the Christian Councils: "... Stephen, and those who think with him, attribute no value to the baptism, except it be administered in the name of Jesus Christ."

The Council of Nicea

During the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine towards Catholicism in 312 A.D., the trinitarians gained political control to eliminate any resistance towards their teachings. In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicea discussed the Arian-Athanasius issue and declared that those who believed in baptism in Jesus' name were required to be rebaptised using the Trinitarian baptismal formula prior to entering the Catholic church. The Trinity doctrine had been accepted by Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. Finally, Pope Pelagius stated that "there are many who say that they baptised in the name of Christ alone and by a single immersion." There were still individuals who maintained baptism in Jesus name alone throughout those troubled times of persecution. Today, more people are becoming aware of this issue through the efforts of many publications, individuals and churches.

Baptism in the New Testament

John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance and only with water (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4-5). He did not baptise with the Holy Spirit. He pointed people to Christ's coming and to repentance from sins.

The Early Disciples

This baptism of John was used by the other disciples who, after Pentecost in 30 AD, received the power of the Holy Spirit. "For John truly baptised with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5). They baptised with water immersion following the example of Jesus (Matthew 3:16). The repentant Christian then received the laying on of hands and received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6; Hebrews 6:2).

The Name Jesus Christ in Christian Baptism

The following verses in the pages of the Bible should be read to prove once and for all whose names or names should be used in Christian Baptism!

Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.""

Acts 8:16: "For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Acts 10:48: "And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days."

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

Romans 6:3: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?"

1 Cor. 6:11: "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

1 Cor. 12:12,13: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

1 Cor. 12:27: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."

Galatians 3:27: "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ."

The early disciples always used the name Lord Jesus or Jesus Christ only. They never used the name of the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit! Peter baptised in the name of Jesus Christ only (Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:4,5). The Trinitarian formula had never been used in Christian baptism as the above scriptures indicate.

Does It Make Any Difference?

A well-known religious figure stated that it made no difference which baptismal formula is used, however is this what the Bible says?

"Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." (Proverbs 30:5-6).

Words must never be added to God's inspired writing and it does make a difference. What is believed must be founded on God's Word lest He should prove one a liar! Christians are to be responsible for "proving all things" and to change one's beliefs if they are contrary to the Word of God (1 Thess. 5:21).

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ only is being baptised with the authority of Jesus Christ and God the Father, since they are one in agreement. (Luke 10:22). Using the name of Jesus Christ also means that one is unified with and acknowledges the Father. It is through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that eternal life is obtained.

Christians are required to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ after which the power of the Holy Spirit is received by the laying on of hands. Through a lifetime of

overcoming sin, growing in Godly character, growing in the knowledge of the truth, they may share an inheritance with Jesus in His Eternal Kingdom.

Bibliography

Thanks go to Mr James McBride of the Churches of God, UK and the staff of The Journal for making information available and for the permission to quote from the sources listed below:

Quotations were provided by Mr McBride from the following sources:-

1. F C Conybeare and (Hibbert Journal 1902)
2. Dr Peake Commentary
3. Dean Stanley, (Christian Institutions)
4. Blacks Bible Dictionary
5. R C Jerusalem Bible (1966)
6. Ency. of Religion and Ethics
7. Hans Conzelmann from the "Outline of the Theology of the New Testament" on page 49

The following quotations were provided from the article, "History of the Trinity: Who developed the Trinity doctrine?" written by Mr. Gary Fakhoury published in The Journal, 31st July 1997 on pages 12 and 13:-

8. The International Biblical Commentary, page 268
9. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, volume 4, pages 26-37, under Baptism
10. Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion, Volume 2, pp. 377-389)
11. The Expositor s' Bible Commentary, Volume 8, page 598
12. Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius
13. Shem Tob's Hebrew Gospel of Matthew

The following quotations were obtained from the article "Historical Development of the Trinitarian Mode of Baptism" by Brother Walter Copes. This article proved very useful tracing the history of the baptismal formula, the quotations used include: -

14. Kurios Christos, Bousset

15. Baptism in the New Testament, G. R. Beasley-Murray (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1962), reprinted 1974, page 82-83
16. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Volume I, Justin Martyr's Apology, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980), page 183.
17. Outlines of the History of Dogma, Adolf Harnack, page 176.
18. Against Praxeas, page 598
19. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. V., Epistle LXX of Cyprian, page 378
20. A History of the Christian Councils, Charles Joseph Hefele, trans. William R. Clark, 2nd, ed., (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1894), pages 108-110
21. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III, Tertullian "Against Praxeas"
22. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. XIV, The Seven Ecumenical Councils
23. The Act of Baptism in the History of the Christian Church, H. S. Burrage, page 77

The following quotations were used from the article, "Water Baptism according to The Bible and Historical References" compiled by Lewis Manuwal and include the following:-

24. Britannica Encyclopedia, 11th Edition, Volume 3, page 365
25. Canney Encyclopedi of Religion, page 53
26. Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 2, page 435

Other Sources

27. Peake's Commentary on the Bible, edited by Matthew Black
28. The New Bible Commentary Revised edited by D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs and D. J. Wiseman
29. The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume one
30. A New Standard Bible Dictionary, edited by Melancthon W. Jacobus, Elbert C. Lane, Andrew C. Zenos with the assistance of Elmer J. Cook (Third Revised Edition used)
31. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia