

## **Is It Necessary to Re-Baptize a Christian Who Leaves an Institutional Congregation?** **By Paul R. Blake**

I received the following good question last week. I enjoyed the study, and the disciple suggested that I teach on this matter. I am happy to share it with you. The question is as follows: "Someone asked me if a person has been baptized into a liberal congregation and they want to start worshipping with a sound one, do they need to be baptized because they weren't really baptized in a sound church. I didn't know how that was handled ... (in the past – prb) or simply don't remember. Can you give me advice on what to tell this person?"

Answer: It will never be a question of where one is baptized in terms of location. The building is completely irrelevant, and I'm sure you already know this. Nor is it a question of who did the baptizing. Many disciples at TR were baptized by institutional preachers, and no one would demand that we re-baptize them.

It is a question of what did they purpose when they were baptized. For example, two disciples take the communion and make an offering; one does it from the heart discerning the Lord's body and gives cheerfully as prospered. The other goes through the motions, not discerning and gives grudgingly. Both performed the same actions, but one purposed from the heart and the other did not. Similarly, baptism is an act of obedience that is purposed from the heart. Paul said in Rom. 6:17... "yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered."

So, there are two elements that must be present: 1) obedience from the heart, and 2) obedience to the doctrine delivered. First, consider doctrine. Does the institutional church teach sound doctrine in the matter of obedience? Regardless of what they teach on other matters, the answer is yes. Most, except for Progressive Institutionalists, teach sound doctrine in salvation matters. Set aside for the moment the matter of institutionalism; can one hear the gospel preached correctly and obey the gospel from the heart apart from the intent of the preacher or the organization? Yes. Paul wrote: "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:15-18). Clearly there were persons preaching from not merely erring, but from quite evil motives, and Paul was rejoicing that the lost were hearing the gospel. So the intent and purpose of the preacher or organization that preaches do not seem to matter. The question is: did he preach Christ and salvation the way it is written?

But someone might object: "But doesn't the Christian Church and some branches of the Baptist Church teach immersion for salvation?" Perhaps the Christian Church did at one time, but they have since become an ecumenical organization accepting nearly everyone into fellowship regardless of soteriology or salvation doctrines. The Baptist Church puts salvation before baptism; so no, denominational baptism does not save because they do not teach the truth on salvation, regardless of the intent of the believer. The hearer cannot be taught error on salvation and purpose to be baptized correctly.

How does an institutional church differ in this? They are erring brethren and not a denomination. Too many brethren think of liberals as a different species or a denomination. They are not any different from a non-institutional church that errs in a matter not related to institutions or social fellowship. For example, a local church endorsed and kept a preacher for a few years who propositioned five women, two of them minors, and to this day the congregation has not repented and repudiated this error. Honest brethren do not consider them sound. But would we require anyone leaving there and coming to a faithful congregation to be re-baptized? There are non-institutional congregations that bind scruples of conscience as if they were the

doctrine of Christ, thus adding to the word. Should elders at sound congregations require members leaving there to be re-baptized?

One error is no different than any another, and just because we may have strong feelings about institutional error does mean we are permitted to view it differently than the errors of non-institutional churches. If we are going to require those who study their way out of a liberal congregation to be re-baptized, then we must be consistent and require those who study their way out of misguided non-institutional churches to be baptized again, too. Suppose the church you attend appointed an unqualified man as an elder, and later your children were baptized; after a while they learn that this isn't right and go to a neighboring sound church. Should they be re-baptized? So it is with those who study their way out of institutional churches.

Second criteria... Did they obey from the heart? The purpose and intent of the believer is critical at this juncture. Did they intend to be baptized FOR the remission of sins INTO the body of Christ? Many, who are baptized based on sectarian or denominational teaching, intend to be baptized for the remission of sins, but not into the body of Christ. They believe that they are being baptized into a sect that they view as part of the body of Christ. They cannot intend to be baptized into a sect and unintentionally be baptized into the body of Christ. Even institutionalists know and teach better. They teach that one is baptized into the body of Christ and not into a sect or a local church. One is not only baptized for the remission of sins, but is also baptized into the body of Christ. Denominations do not teach this; therefore, one cannot be taught wrong about salvation and intend to be baptized right.

In a liberal church, one is taught right about salvation; and, therefore can purpose from the heart to be baptized right. Once he studies further and learns about the correct organization of the church, he can leave institutionalism for a faithful congregation. I would suggest he declare his intention to stand for the truth and perhaps confess the sin of having fellowship with error in ignorance. But I do not believe he should be re-baptized. However, if his conscience demands that he should, I would happily accommodate him. I would also rebuke anyone who tried to bind their own opinion or scruples of conscience on him by demanding he be re-baptized.

When we view the non-relevant circumstances and do not focus on the whole purpose of baptism and true fellowship with the Lord and His Body, it becomes easy to lose sight of what constitutes salvation and what really puts one in fellowship with God. Thank you for the challenging question.