

Trine Immersion

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."

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"TRINE immersion" means a threefold immersion, or immersing a person three times as one ceremony. It has reference to the practice of those who, in administering the rite of baptism, plunge the candidate three times beneath the water. In this argument those who follow this method will be designated as "trine immersionists." The people in this country who have adopted this practice, like all who are trying to follow the Lord conscientiously, are no doubt very excellent people; but this is not a sufficient defense for a practice which is not in accord with the plain instruction of the Bible. One who is troubled about this doctrine writes as follows concerning it:

"I notice the Greek Church, the 'Brethren,' and perhaps some others, use trine immersion. I also note that there is a \$500 prize offered for proof of a single use of backward action baptism for several hundred years after Christ's time. I also noticed recently that T. De Witt Talmage answered, as to trine immersion, that there was no doubt but it was the original form of baptism. I also note that some very excellent Greek scholars decide that the formula, as given in Matthew, can not be fulfilled without three immersions. Is it possible that your church is not following Christ's teaching in this particular, as the other churches are not doing as regards the fourth commandment? Please answer fully and oblige." ¹¹

It is certainly the sincere desire of the writer of this tract, and the people whom he represents (the Seventh-day Adventists), to follow fully the teachings of Christ in all things. But in the points noted above we fail to find any proof that Christ

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ever taught this threefold form of baptism. The "Greek Church," the "Brethren," the "\$500 prize," and "T. De Witt Talmage," are of no account whatever on a question which must depend on the direct testimony of the Scriptures themselves. It matters not how *near* to apostolic times a doctrine can be traced, if it does not really touch their times, and can not be found in the record they have given us, it is like a broken electric wire the "current" of truth is not in it.

The only allusion, in the foregoing note, to the teachings of Christ, is the reference to the formula of Matt.28:19: "Baptizing them in the name of the Father,

and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The whole question turns on the word "baptizing." Does it denote one action or three? It is said that the verb "baptize" is a verb of "repetition," and therefore denotes more than one action. Then we inquire, Why limit it to three? Why may it not mean more than three? Admitting that it is a verb denoting repeated action, is there any proof that the repeated action pertains to the *same individual*? Of course the act is repeated indefinitely, as the ministers of Christ baptize some in "all nations."

But, it is urged, there are three names in the commission, and therefore the act must be performed three times. But it does not read, "in the names," but "in the name," showing that all are included in one name. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, therefore, constitute, with reference to the work of conversion, *the name*. It is the name, so to speak, of a firm, all the members of which are equally concerned in the work. To perform a baptism in the name of each one separately destroys this unity. It is not so done in ordinary transactions among men, and we should avoid giving to language in the Bible a different meaning from that which it has in ordinary use, unless there is some proof in the context to show that it is used in a tropical sense. Firms consisting of three parties are numerous in the commercial world; and anything done by their agent

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for them in the firm name, is done only once for them all. If a firm composed of J. Field, E. Jacobs, and P. Sampson, should send an agent to deposit a thousand dollars in a bank, and the banker should ask him, "In whose name do you deposit this money?" he would reply, "In the name of J. Field, E. Jacobs, and P. Sampson;" or, in the shorter and more common form, "In the name of Field, Jacobs & Sampson." This would not signify that he deposited a thousand dollars for each name, making three thousand dollars in all, but only a thousand dollars in the name of all combined, because all are equally concerned in it. But the union existing between the members of any commercial firm comes infinitely far short of that existing between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and a baptism is not required for each one, as though they were independent parties; but *one* baptism shows the relation of the sinner alike to all three; and that is all that is required.

It is said, further, that the language is elliptical, and that the ellipsis can be supplied only by reading it thus: "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and [baptizing them in the name] of the Son, and [baptizing them in the name] of the Holy Ghost." But this is not true. The facts of the Scriptures, as well as the analogies of language, are against it. Try it in reference to the second coming of Christ. The Scriptures plainly teach that Christ will come in the glory of the Father, and in His own glory, and in that of the holy angels. According to the trine immersionist's argument, we should have to come to this conclusion: Christ will come (once) in the glory of the Father (Mark8:38); and He will come (another time) in His own glory (Matt.25:31); and He will come (a third time) in the glory of the angels (2Thess.1:7,8). According to the analogy of language, this would be an exact parallel to their claim on Matt.28:19. But it is not true. The second coming of Christ is but *one coming*, enveloped in a *threefold* glory.

Try the argument again on Ex.3:15: "And God said moreover unto Moses Thus shalt thou say

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unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham [one God], the God of Isaac [a second God], and the God of Jacob [a third God], hath sent me unto you," etc. We can claim three different Gods from Ex.3:15, on the same ground, and with just as much evidence, as three baptisms can be claimed from the wording of Matt.28:19.

A very brief examination of the subject is sufficient to show further that trine immersion is "three baptisms," which contradicts the declaration of Paul that there is only *one* baptism (Eph.4:5); that it is entirely out of harmony with the form of baptism set forth by Paul in Romans 6; and that in the ceremony of trine immersion, the significance of the ordinance is entirely lost.

1. Trine immersionists never sprinkle, because they hold that the Greek word "*baptize*" means only to immerse. On this point, then, we stand upon common ground, that baptism and immersion are synonymous terms; that nothing else but immersion, or being buried in the water, is baptism. But we turn to Eph.4:5, and there we read that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Inserting the equivalent term "immersion," it would read as follows: "One Lord, one faith, *one immersion*." But trine immersion means *three* immersions, whereas the apostle admits only one.

It may be urged that inasmuch as the Greek Church practices trine immersion, we ought to follow them in the interpretation of their own language. There would be more force in this claim if they were consistent with themselves; but while they are evidently true to the language when they "immerse" because the commandment is to "baptize," they just as clearly depart from it by adopting three immersions, when Paul says there is but one; for trine immersion, as already noticed, is in reality nothing but three baptisms. To say that it is only one baptism with three immersions, is a contradiction of terms, if baptism means immersion, as they admit. It is equivalent to saying, "There is one baptism with three baptisms,"

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which would be absurd. To decide otherwise would be to admit that baptism is not identical with immersion; but that would be to throw the whole subject of the *mode* or manner of baptism into doubt, and leave that an open question yet to be settled.

It further appears that their practice is not consistent with their theory; for they say that baptism is three immersions; and hence they could carry out the commission of Christ only as follows: Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them (thrice immersing them) in the name of the Father, and baptizing them (thrice immersing them) in the name of the Son, and baptizing them (thrice immersing them) in the name of the Holy Ghost. And thus nine immersions, instead of only three, would be necessary to fulfill the commission. Trine immersionists can not possibly avoid this conclusion, unless they admit that they truly and properly baptize in each name by one immersion. But to say that one "baptism" is truly administered by one "immersion," is fatal to their theory.

In favor of a plurality of baptisms, Heb.6:2 is sometimes quoted ("the doctrine of baptisms"). This certainly refers to a plurality of baptisms. Then why do they deny that they practice three baptisms? Where is the necessity for them to twist language into such a contradictory form as to say, "One baptism with three immersions"? Paul is correct in speaking of baptisms (plural), for there is more than one. There is the baptism of the Spirit, the baptism of water, and the baptism of suffering. John1:33; Matt.20:22. To say there are three of any one kind is to contradict the plain statement of Paul. There is only one baptism of each of the kinds spoken of.

Tertullian mentions three baptisms, by which it appears that the practice of trine immersion was beginning to be introduced as early as his day. The matter, however, is put in its true light, if Professor Stewart correctly quotes him as saying, "Thence we thrice immerse, answering (that is,

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fulfilling) somewhat more than the Lord had decreed in the Gospel." *De Corona Militis*, #3. Here he gives the whole practice away, by admitting that it is *more* than the Lord decreed; and the language of the gospels plainly shows that the Lord never decreed three baptisms, but only one. And when Paul emphatically says there is only one, to introduce more is to go beyond the word of the Lord, as Tertullian admits.

2. We have said also that the practice of trine immersion is entirely out of harmony with the form of baptism set forth by Paul in Romans 6. There the apostle says that we are "buried with Him [Christ] by baptism into death;" and again, verse 5, "Planted together in the likeness of His death." Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. 1Cor.15:3,4. Then death, burial, and resurrection is the order brought to view, and this order baptism is meant to represent; for, as being buried in the water is the likeness of Christ's burial, the coming up out of the water is "the likeness of His resurrection." That Paul has reference to this order in Romans 6 is evident, for he speaks first of our being "dead" to sin (verse 2), then being "buried" into Christ's death, by being buried with Him by baptism (verse 4), then coming up from the water "in the likeness of His resurrection" (verse 5). And we might ask right here with reference to the foregoing proposition, Did Christ die three times? was He buried three times? was He raised from the dead three times? And in the likeness thereof must the sinner backslide and die to sin three times? and be baptized three times? and be raised up out of the water three times? Yes, according to the view of the trine immersionists, but not according to the Scriptures.

But trine immersionists plunge the candidate three times, face forward, into the water. Is that a likeness of Christ's death and burial? The practice of the Jews must govern our ideas in this matter of form, and they laid their dead decently on the back in the tomb, not face downward. It would be repugnant to all our ideas of propriety

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to bury our dead face downward. Christ was not so buried; hence that is not the form of baptism to be followed, according to Romans 6.

To justify the forward action it is sometimes said that Christ bowed His head upon the cross, and gave up the ghost, and that makes the forward movement in baptism appropriate. If this be so, then the candidate should go into water of such a depth that simply bowing the head would cause the immersion of the whole body; but this is hardly possible. On the other hand, in trine immersion it is asserted that the candidate kneels down in the water, and then the whole forward portion of the body is plunged forward three times under the water. The Saviour did nothing of this kind on the cross; hence there is not here the least likeness of Christ's death. Thus, from every point of view, the proposition is established that trine immersion is contrary to the form of baptism set forth by Paul in Romans 6, and in all the Scriptures.

3. In trine immersion the significance of the ordinance is entirely lost. If the foregoing propositions have been proved, as it is confidently submitted that they have been, the one now before us follows as a matter of course. The significance of baptism lies in the showing forth of our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; and the form of baptism must be such as to resemble, as nearly as may be, those great facts. If we go through a ceremony which has no resemblance to the burial and resurrection of Christ, the significance of our act as indicating that faith is lost. The forward action and the three plunges, having nothing in common with the service performed in the burial of Christ, can not be the form to be followed.

It is sometimes said that baptism is the "door into the church." If this be so, it is against the forward plunging; for in that case the candidate is raised up backward, and goes into the church through that door in that manner. But one does not usually, when he goes to the house of a friend, and the door is opened, turn around and back into

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the house. We must have the *backward* movement in the burial in baptism, to have the *forward* movement in being raised up out of the water, to go naturally through that door into the church.

As to the \$500 prize for proof of a single use of the backward action in baptism for several hundred years *after* Christ's time, as noted in the question of the correspondent first quoted, we can just as safely offer a prize of \$5,000 for proof of a single instance of the *forward* plunge during New Testament and apostolic times, which is the *only* safe and reliable period in the history of the Christian church. As has already been said, it matters not how nearly an error can be traced to apostolic times; if it does not actually reach them, it has no ground for a claim of truthfulness. The practice of the Greek Church on this point is of no more account than is the practice of the Roman Catholic Church in sprinkling, purgatory, Mariolatry, saint worship, Sunday-keeping, and a hundred other superstitions, which can be traced back to the very early bogs of apostasy in the Christian church; as far back, in short, as trine immersion. A man may accept, and begin to advocate, the most monstrous errors in *half a day's time*, if he will give himself up to his own vain imagination, and to the suggestions which the evil one is ever ready to instill into minds which are ready to receive them.

When we come to history on this subject, that history deals only with these apostate times. Much is made of history by trine immersionists; for, as in the case of all traditions, their proof for their position is found only there. But even history, as can be shown, does not sustain them, but in reality disproves their claims. To those who wish to examine this subject further, we commend the excellent work entitled "Christian Baptism," by the late Elder J. H. Waggoner, published at the *Review and Herald* office, Battle Creek, Mich., which thoroughly deals with the subject from both the scriptural and historical point of view.

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