

IS THERE A BAPTISMAL FORMULA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The fullest statement concerning a formula is found in Matthew 28:18-20 which reads: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, 'all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'."

It is good to remember that this is Jesus speaking, and emphasis should to be given to a number of things in the passage: (1) These are final statements (marching orders!) of Christ, given shortly before his ascension into heaven, (2) These are the words of the One who has all authority in heaven and on the earth, (3) The term "name" is in the singular denoting the oneness of the Deity, (4) These same instructions were to be taught to those who were converted to Christ, and (5) Contingent upon their obedience in this process, Christ promises His continuous presence with His followers until the end of the age.

The Acts accounts do not give a formula as is clear in the reading of the passages. Note the following statements in Acts relative to people being baptized into the body of Christ:

(1) Acts 2:38, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "

(2) Acts 8:12-16: "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

(3) Acts 8:38-39: "And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing."

(4) Acts 9:17-18: "And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the way by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately, there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he arose and was baptized.."

(5) Acts 10:47-48: "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he? And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

(6) Acts 16:14-15: "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening: and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household and been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay'."

(7) Acts 16:32-33, "And he (the Jailer) took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household."

(8) Acts 18:8: "And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."

(9) Acts 19:3-5: "And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.'" And when they had heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

(10) Acts 22:16: "And now, why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

Notice that in six of the ten statements about baptism in Acts, it just says they were baptized. In two it says "in the name of the Lord Jesus," in two it says "in the name of Jesus Christ." Ferguson, in his *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (p. 132) says, "Baptism 'in the name of Jesus' appears to have been a description of the meaning of the act or a reference to the confession accompanying the baptism and not a formula pronounced at the baptism. He also remarks that "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" is frequently found in second century literature as a formula accompanying baptism (Ibid.).

A frequent meaning of "in the name of" is "by the authority of" in the book of Acts, as in the case of the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple and the aftermath (3:6, 16, 4:7, 10, 12, 18, 30, 5:28, 40,41). This is very similar to Christ's encounter with the Jewish leaders who demanded to know from whence had come His authority to cleanse the temple, and also the subsequent statements about the authority by which John the Baptist was baptizing in Matthew 21:23-27. "And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?' And Jesus answered and said to them, 'I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?' They began reasoning among themselves, saying, 'If we say, from heaven, He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 'But if we say, from men, we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet.' And answering Jesus they said, 'We do not know.'" He also said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things'."

Due to the fact that two New Testament passages say that baptism should be, "in the name of the Lord Jesus," and two "In the name of Jesus Christ," there are those who have chosen to ignore the longer formula ("in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit"), as given by Matthew 28:18-20, baptizing only in the name of Jesus. What is clear is that the early church practiced baptism according to the longer formula given by Matthew.

THE DIDACHE: Probably written in Syria between 100 and 150 AD (PATROLOGY, J. Quasten, Vol. I, P. 97), stated: "Baptize as follows: after first explaining all these points, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... (Ibid, p. 31).

JUSTIN MARTYR: Justin, in about 150 AD (Apol . 1, 61), stated that candidates for baptism "receive the washing with water in the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit." (Ibid, p. 25).

THE EPISTOLA APOSTOLORUM: This document from about 150 AD, "expands this profession of faith (the trinitarian formula, CM) from three sections to five. Its Creed contains not only the faith 'in the Father, the ruler of the entire world, and in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and in the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete' but adds 'in the Holy Church and in the forgiveness of sins'." (Ibid).

IRENÆUS: Born about 140 BC, Irenaeus is active as a Christian apologist late in the 2nd century and early in the 3rd century AD. "Irenaeus is firmly convinced that the teaching of the Apostles continues to live on unaltered. This tradition is the source and the norm of the faith. It is the canon of truth. For Irenaeus this canon of truth seems to be the baptismal creed, for he says that we receive it in baptism (Adv. Haer. I, 9,4): "The Church, although scattered over the whole world even to its extremities, received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who by the prophets proclaimed the dispensation, the advent, the virgin birth, the passion and resurrection from the dead..." (Ibid p. 300)

HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME: His well known work the APOSTOLIC TRADITION, written about 215 AD presents, among a number of other subjects, a triune baptismal form (three immersions), certainly a departure from apostolic doctrine, but none the less, this work is consistent with earlier teaching in that it tells us that baptism involves the Trinitarian formula. Before each immersion, the candidate is asked if he believes in one member of the Godhead: Before the first immersion, he is asked: Doest thou believe in God the Father Almighty? And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. Let him forthwith baptize him once, having his hand laid upon his head. And after this let him say, Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God?... And when he says: I believe, let him baptize the second time. And again let him say: Doest thou believe in the Holy Spirit?... And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. And so let him baptize him the third time." (Ibid, Vol. II, p. 191).

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