

BAPTISM: THE BELIEVER'S WEDDING CEREMONY (A Review)

This book by Bro. LaGard Smith has been on the market for several years. There was a time in the not too distant past when all members of churches of Christ understood this foundational doctrine. They needed no such books to remind them of what they clearly perceived when they were saved from their sins and added to Christ's church. Of our preachers this was all the more the case. But that was then, and this is now and a generation has arisen that knows not the important role of baptism in God's plan for saving lost mankind.

Bro. Smith has done a marvelous job gleaning from Scripture the many aspects of Christian baptism and its essential role in our salvation. Using the metaphor of a wedding ceremony he leads his readers through the many biblical verses and teachings relating to baptism. He clarifies mistaken views of baptism held by some Christians. For example that baptism is not the end of obedience, but the beginning; that baptism puts us into Christ himself, not just joins us to a church; that baptism is more than a step to be taken, or command to be obeyed, it is God's appointed time and place to unite us with Christ. He reminds us that salvation is by the grace of God and that without faith it is impossible to please God. Those being immersed need to understand these two great truths. He stresses that baptism in no way earns for us or merits our salvation. He emphasizes the role of the blood of Christ as that which cleanses us from sin and of baptism which brings us into a saving relationship with Christ.

Smith does an excellent job responding to the many erroneous views of baptism found in the religious world. Matters such as infant baptism, baptism as a sign of prior salvation and distortions such as sprinkling and pouring of water on a person as baptism are deftly handled. He provides an excellent response to those who deny the essentiality of baptism by citing the case of the Thief on the Cross.

The author cites numerous authorities from Protestant and Catholic literature that demonstrate that honest scholars recognize the same truths we hold regarding baptism, even though their churches do not acknowledge or practice them. For example, he cites Martin Luther, "For this reason I would have those who are to be baptized completely immersed in water as the Word says..." (Luther's Works, Vol 36, p. 68).

The writer warns us of the insufficiency and dangers of rushing young children into baptism before they are mature enough to know the guilt of sin and to make their own commitment to Christ. The same mistake can be made in pushing prospects into baptism before they have truly committed their hearts to Christ.

In his twelfth chapter the author provides an excellent discussion of the question of rebaptism.

While his approach is fresh and not presented in the usual format used by our brethren, I find it valuable and helpful. This book will provide several good sermons for perceptive preachers. It will help members with shallow biblical knowledge better understand the subject of baptism. As with most books, readers may find a few things they would express differently, but on the whole I think anyone will be profited by reading it.

This book may be ordered from the **Gospel Advocate, P. O. Box 150, Nashville, TN 37202.** JHW