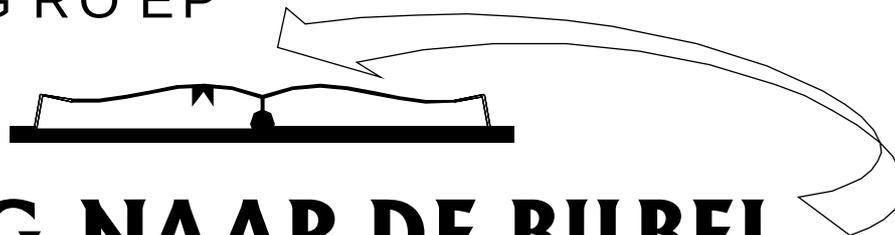


WERK GROEP



TERUG NAAR DE BIJBEL

Kampen, February 2012

Biblestudy by ing. R.v.d.Kraats , subject "The baptism formula"

Dear brothers, sisters, ministers and deacons,
We were asked the following question further to our publication about the Holy Trinity. We believe this question is important enough to extensively pay attention to . You must see this letter as an addition to study about the Trinity.

Which baptism formula is the right one?

- 1.being baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?
- 2.being baptised in the name of Jesus?
- 3.being baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus?

This question cannot easily be answered. Yet, we do not hold back to make a pronouncement on this. We believe that the baptism formula spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matth.28:19 is the only right formula.

Questioning this text is, according to us, questioning whether the Bible is true. So, we believe:

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Now we could make some comments. Which we will deal with explicitly below.

1.Questioning the authenticity of Jesus' statement.

A number of the Bible commentaries (we consulted eight) indicate that people are not sure whether Jesus has spoken the baptism formula this literally. It is rather thought that the apostle Matthew wrote it down in this way of their own accord. Also the possibility is left open that this part was added later. The well-known Church Father Eusebius (263-339, surnamed Father of Church History) holds this opinion. He thinks the original text read: *"..baptize them in my name.."* Matthew wrote his gospel in the period between the Christ's Ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD). Unfortunately, nothing of Matthew's original writings has been recovered. Actually, the same goes for all other gospels and letters of the New Testament. These writings, written on papyrus, have worn out and decayed literally in the course of time. So, we cannot verify this. Our current Bible is based on copies, for which evidence like correspondence, books, archaeological discoveries and translations have been used as resources. It leads to far to go more deeply into this. Well, it is important to know that in church history there has been little or no textual criticism on the subject of the baptism formula. From this the carefully conclusion may be drawn that the early church had no problems to use the formula: *"..baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."* Especially in the first three centuries of the church there was much discussion and tough "fights" on a number of doctrinal issues, but certainly not the baptism formula.

To be perfectly clear it is right to mention that in this case it is not about the Roman-Catholic church, as some, current Christians mean. No, if we speak about the early church, we mean the church that was established on the first Pentecost according to the description in Acts until about three hundred years afterwards. In the letters of Paul, Peter, James and John we see its development to spiritual maturity. And in Revelations we see the future and destiny of the church of Christ. The successors of the apostles, called church fathers, had to further develop the early church. Especially the composition of the New Testament (the canon) and the determination of the godhead of Jesus Christ, required of them much wisdom and divine revelation. In order to reach determination the spiritual leaders gathered several times in a council. On this councils all important churches were represented and the deacons and bishops were named after the place-names of their churches. It were big councils of

sometimes over three hundred people, but there was no special bishop who played first fiddle in the decisions. The bishop of Rome was represented, but had an equal contribution as the bishops of Constantinople, Ephesus, Carthage, Alexandria, etc. So the idea that for example the Trinity of God and the composition of the New Testament were thought up by the Roman Catholic church is wrong. Only when the Roman Empire collapsed around 1600 the religious power of the bishop of Rome started to develop and the current Roman Catholic realm with the pope at the head was coming up. The Roman Catholic church extricated itself from the Eastern Church. These churches have persisted up until now, called Greek Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Egyptian Orthodox Church, etc.

For the present Christians it is easier than for the earlier Christians. We only have to turn up a Bible and we can exactly specify what we mean. This was impossible during the early days of the church. The art of printing was only invented in the fifteenth century. Until that time people were totally dependent on hand written (copied) of parts of the Old and New Testament. These copies were rare and expensive. Only the rich and those who could read could make use of them. In fact, we benefit from what our predecessors, i.e. the Christians of the early church, have worked out, mutually discussed and "fought out". Mostly the final results of a council were established in a confession of faith. In our reformed churches these are used literally during services.

2. Jesus' baptism.

While baptising in the River Jordan no baptism formula was used. What was said by John the Baptist is unknown to us. Yet, it is important to give it a moment's thought, since this was the baptism of the Son of God. With this He led the way for all future persons receiving baptism of His church. His motivation to be baptized was not His sinful life. No, since He was without sin, but He did it to fulfil all justice. With this, Jesus clearly stated that His example had to be followed by His followers, His disciples. If we turn the spotlights on that event in the Jordan River for a moment, we will see the following: *"And Jesus, when He had been baptized, went up straightway out of the water."* Thus He was baptized by immersion, which means, according to Rom.6:3, that the old sinful life is being buried. As soon as Jesus stands up in the newness of life, the following

happens: *"I (John) saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and It abode upon Him."* So, when Jesus rises from the water, He receives the Holy Spirit. For His followers, His disciples this means that they receive and experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (Rom.8:9-17) If we stay at the events in the Jordan River we hear the following: *"This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased"* During the baptismal ceremony God confirms to Jesus that He is His Father. For the followers of Jesus who are being baptized, goes that they may be called Children of God. According to Rom. 8:15 they may call: Abba, Father. They have received the Spirit of sonship.

We can conclude that God during the first official baptism of the early church, was present in the persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three made their presence very much felt. Is it strange than when Jesus later commands the church to baptize His followers in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?

3.Point in time of Jesus' statement.

The baptism formula is part of Jesus' last words. He said this just before His Ascension. By then, His body was a glorified body, which could go through everything and could appear and disappear everywhere, just like that. In His resurrection body he instructed His disciples, and His disciples alone, for forty days. Luke says in Acts 1:3 *"... being seen by them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."* During this period, the disciples and thus the apostle Matthew were given the last and definitive instructions about the future church. It is beyond doubt, that the apostle Matthew wrote these down somewhere and used them later while writing his gospel. This indicates all the more that the text in Matth.28:19 is fully trustworthy.

4. The baptism on the first Pentecost.

Jesus instruction on baptism in water was immediately put into practice by the disciples. On the first Pentecost over three thousand new converts were baptized. After his sermon and in answer to the questions of the public Peter says: *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... Then those who gladly received his words were baptized, and*

that same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Acts 2:38-41 If we take a closer look at this occasion, the first thing that strikes us is that Peter does not mention the complete baptism formula, but only the name of Jesus Christ. Why he says it like this is unknown. There is no point in speculation on this. We believe in the infallibility of the Bible. So we believe the text in Matth.28:19 is infallible, but also that the text in Acts 2:38 is infallible. This seems contradictory. That is why it is good to recall the following facts.

John the Baptist started baptizing, but it is not written down on whose name he baptized. After Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John, the disciples started baptizing too. *"When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John. (though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples), He left Judea..."* John 4:1-3. It is plausible that the disciples by then baptized in the name of Jesus. Because of this they were experienced in baptizing and that in the name of Jesus. They needed it, since they had to baptize three thousand converts on that day. This was no sinecure qua organisation, energy and time. Those who baptize themselves or have baptized will agree.

In common with Jesus baptism in the Jordan River, on the first Pentecost all persons of the Holy Trinity are actively involved. *"Therefore (Jesus) being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear."* Acts 2:33

5. Other descriptions of baptism in the Bible.

The Book of Acts describes baptism stories in other places, which is important in connection to this subject.

In Acts 8:4-17 we read about revival in Samaria as a result of Philip's preaching. He baptized the converts in the name of Jesus, but there were no signs whatsoever that the Holy Spirit came upon them. Then the disciples sent Peter and John to Samaria. After they had laid hands upon the baptized converts they received the Holy Spirit. *"For as yet, He had fallen upon none of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (verse 16). In this case, baptizing in the name of Jesus obviously was not sufficient, but the name of the Holy Spirit had to be mentioned too.

In Acts 8:26-39 we read the story of the man of Ethiopia. When he is baptized by Philip, the Bible does not tell us in whose name he is baptized. Though it is obvious that all three persons of the Holy Trinity are mentioned. *"And he (the man from Ethiopia) answered and said: I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down in the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they had come out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip...."* (verses 37-39)

When Ananias comes to Paul in Damascus, after he had met Jesus on his way, he lays hands on Paul and baptizes him. *"Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus who appeared unto thee on the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized."* Acts 9:17-19. In Acts 22:1-22 Paul tells his story once again, this time to the hostile Jews in Jerusalem. *"And Ananias said: The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized...."* By this water baptism all three persons of the Holy Trinity are active.

When Cornelius and others present are being baptized in Caesarea, Peter commands to baptize them in the name of Jesus Christ. *"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."* (Acts 10:44-48) In this section God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are mentioned actively, while in Peter's preceding sermon God the Father is quoted exhaustively.

Chapter 19 of Act describes the meeting of Paul in Ephesus with twelve disciples, who had only been baptized with the baptism of John. He explains them the Gospel and have them baptized once again and yet in the name of Jesus. *"When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them..."* (verses 5 and 6). In this story two person of the Trinity are mentioned actively.

6. Water baptism in the Letters to the Romans and the Galatians.

Up until now, we have mostly discussed baptism stories. The whole Book of Acts narrates about the origin of the church. In the letters of the apostles more is written about the theological contents. Often, reactions on abuses in the church are the reason to explain issues and record them so to say. Yet, we find no problems on water baptism in the letters so we do not find any discourse on this either. From this we may deduce that everybody agreed with the way in which water baptism took place. But Paul does describe the deeper meaning of water baptism. He writes in Rom.6:3-4: *"Know ye not that as many of us were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* With this he indicates that water baptism means that we identify ourselves with Christ. It is not just a ritual, but a sign of actual change in the life of the person to be baptized. In the letter to the Galatians (3:26-27) Paul says the same but in other words: *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."* By going under in Christ as it were, we can handle life after the water baptism. Our Christian life will then be determined by the following: *"But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His spirit that dwelleth in you."* Rom.8:11
If we let ourselves be convinced by all of this, we see that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are involved in Paul's description of water baptism.

8.Relationship with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

If Jesus here on earth speaks about His parting, He promises His disciples that the Father will send the Holy Spirit as representative. He says: *"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* John 14:25,26. It would have been infeasible for the followers to remember everything Jesus taught. Compared to what the Pharisees and scribes preached, it was a revolutionary message. In order to fully understand this message, the support of the Holy Spirit was indispensable.

One of the theological problems was the person of Jesus. On earth He was the son of Joseph and Mary, but what was He after His death and resurrection and what was He after His Ascension? He called Himself the Son of God, He addressed God as His Father. For the Jewish tradition this was blasphemy and it caused His sentence to be crucified. Through this statement He signed His own death warrant. Until now the Jewish leaders had taught the people that the Lord God was their God and that this God was one. "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.*" Deut.6:4. On the scribe" question what the biggest command was, Jesus answered: "*The first (command) is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord....'*" Mark 12:30. It is obvious that in the first years of the Christian church, especially in the Jewish part, there was hesitation to recognize Jesus as Son of God. Since this meant that God was not one but two persons. For this the Christian Jews had to make an enormous reversal in their thinking. What's more Jesus did not consider the Holy Spirit as some kind of divine power, but presented Him as a person. He called Him, among others, the Comforter, who would stay with them for all eternity. So beside the person of God the Father, they were confronted with the persons God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

From the annals of church history it turns out that there was quite some discussion, writing and quarrelling about this in the first three centuries. Athanasius (295-373), the bishop of Alexandria (Egypt) devoted almost his whole life to the defence of the statement that Jesus was the Son of God so He was God too. He had to compete against Arius, an important presbyter, who states that Jesus was not the Son of God, but became so later on. In His line of thought Jesus was a created being of a high order, who after His resurrection and ascension became God's Son. At the Council of Nicaea (325 Turkey) Arius' doctrine was designated heretical and he was banned from ecclesiastical life. Yet, his doctrine has had an influence on a number of churches for a long time. In 381 the matter was raised again at the Council of Constantinople (present Istanbul in Turkey) and the judgment of Nicaea was fully confirmed.

In the following centuries the general Christian church never doubted God's Trinity again. Although there have been movements with a different point of view. Think of the cult of the Mormons and the cult of Jehovah's witnesses. They reject the doctrine that Jesus was already God

before He came to earth and teach that He is created and was exalted to God through His role on earth.

In the charismatic World the American William Branham (1909-1965) caused quite some commotion by stating that the doctrine of the Trinity came from the Roman Catholic church. He designated Every church that did not believe as he did as diabolic and called the doctrine of the Trinity a diabolic doctrine. For this reason he believed that the baptism formula in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit was false. He even went as far as forcing followers who had been baptized with this formula to be baptized again, but then in the name of Jesus. Since Branham was quite influential in the Pentecostal movement the baptism formula was critically considered once again in many churches. In many churches a compromise was reached and they baptized with the following formula: "we baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus". At first this seems to be a good compromise, they answer to the baptism formula of Matth.28:19 and to the formula which is found in many baptism stories in the Book of Acts. Considered more closely this is theologically a weak solution. In fact they say while baptizing: "we baptize you in the name of the Father, in the name of Jesus, in the name of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus". The name of Jesus is mentioned twice, while God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are mentioned only once. With this the person baptizing indicates that Jesus is more important than God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in the Bible this line of thought is supported. Probably the baptist is not aware of this possible conclusion and he does not mean it that way either.

Summary and conclusion.

If we let the above written sink in calmly, we will see the following. It is the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ who commands the church to baptize new members in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son and in the name of the Holy Spirit. No motives can be brought up to depart from His instruction.

We can only guess why the disciples and even the apostle Paul depart from this. In all baptism stories in which people are being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ we see the two divine persons actively mentioned

or actively present. In the explanation of Paul about the deeper meaning of baptism, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are present as well. There has been little to none textual criticism to Matth.28:19. The early church occupied itself more with the divinity of the person of Jesus. In Nicaea it was definitely decided that the doctrine that Jesus is God and that the Holy Spirit is God was true. This was decided based on the Writings which were considered normative for a long time in the churches and which formed the New Testament.

The general Christian church of which we are a part has used the baptism formula of Matth.28:19 without hesitation, through the centuries. We do not think it relevant to go deeper into the baptism of children or adults. We only want to concentrate on the use of the baptism formula. The thought that we are led by a Roman Catholic doctrine is wrong. Luther, who is not known as Roman Catholic, called the Council of Nicaea: "the most holy of all councils". Even he had no problems using this baptism formula. The same goes for Calvin.

As we see it there is no reason to depart from this baptism formula in the charismatic churches. We advice against the use of the name of Jesus twice because this is not based on the Bible and could cause confusion. Using only the name of Jesus does not correspond with the instruction of Jesus in Matth.28:19. We would like to finish with this text:

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

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