

Ordinances Pt. 1

Module 3.5

The Charis Fellowship believes that Jesus Christ has given ordinances to his church. These ordinances are ceremonial in nature, symbolize a spiritual reality expressly taught within the Scriptures, and have been commanded by Christ for all believers to follow. Specifically, the two ordinances we believe Jesus has given to his church are baptism and communion. In part 1 of this module we will look at the ordinance of triune immersion (baptism); in part 2 we will turn our attention to three-fold communion.

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. Just like a wedding ring is an outward sign of marriage, baptism is an outward sign of salvation. However, wearing a wedding ring does not make you married and in the very same way baptism does not save you rather, it outwardly pictures salvation. Over the past 2,000 years the church has held to the doctrine of baptism for two very specific reasons. It is commanded by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 and is demonstrated by the disciples and first converts to Christianity (Acts 2:41; 8:36).

Within the Evangelical world the Charis Fellowship is unique in that it practices not just baptism, but triune immersion. By this we mean that we immerse the person under water three times. While holding to this conviction we also fully recognize that there is not one specific New Testament command that uses the words "triune immersion." Consequently, we hold these convictions humbly and do not seek to disparage other churches who baptize professing believers in another way. Nevertheless, our rationale for triune immersion is most easily summarized into three sections: 1) Historical. 2) Doctrinal, 3) Grammatical.

Historically, "since the very inception of [the Brethren] movement in 1708 [we] have practiced triune immersion"¹ Furthermore, while the evidence is not fully conclusive, we believe that the Didache provides a strong indication that the early church practiced some form of triune immersion as well.² Therefore, we do not see our practice of triune immersion being a historical anomaly but rather one that is consistent with some of the earliest accounts of the church and our movement.

¹ Plaster, David. *Baptism by Triune Immersion*: Grace Theological Journal 6.2 (1985) pg. 383

² Didache 7. 1-3 "1. Concerning baptism, baptize (sic) thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, baptize (sic), in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," in running water; 2. But if thou hast no running water, baptize (sic) in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. 3. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head "in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

Doctrinally, we believe that the mode of baptism must reflect the truth it is picturing. Here is a bullet summary of what we believe about baptism doctrinally:

- Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12).
- Baptism is a physical act that pictures our salvation, it does not create salvation or dispense grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Baptism has been commanded by Christ to be continually observed by the church and Christ's disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).
- Baptism is a celebration of grace. It is a declaration that the one being baptized has received new life by God's grace and is now publicly committing their lives to obedience.

Furthermore, triune immersion best pictures the doctrinal truth that all three members of the Trinity are active in our salvation. In Ephesians 1:3-14³ the Apostle Paul writes about our trinitarian salvation and the active role that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each play. In this text Paul specifically highlights their roles by using the phrase "to the praise of his glory (grace)" three separate times.

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] **to the praise of his glorious grace**, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. [11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be **to the praise of his glory**. [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, **to the praise of his glory**.⁴

³ Paul also specifically writes about our trinitarian salvation in Titus 3:4-7.

⁴ Emphasis mine. Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

We believe triune immersion is the best picture of the doctrine of trinitarian salvation; a picture which Jesus commanded his disciples to perpetuate in his absence. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus instructs his disciples to, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Grammatically, we believe that the word baptize is best defined as immerse, and that Jesus’ use of the definite article, “the”, in Matthew 28:19-20 supports our conviction of triune immersion.

In Matthew 28:19, the participle “baptizing” is derived from the word βάπτω, which means to immerse or dip.⁵ In extra biblical writings from the first century the word βαπτίζω is translated “to dip in or under” or “to dye material,”⁶ Additionally, there are several other New Testament texts that also use the word βαπτίζω. Based on the context of these other passages we see the definition of βαπτίζω, as “immerse”, to be affirmed and support. For the purposes of this position paper only Acts 8:36; 38-39 will be highlighted.⁷

Acts 8:36; 38-39

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being **baptized**?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he **baptized** him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.⁸

Here we have the word βαπτίζω used twice along with a description of what happened with the Ethiopian and Phillip. We read that they “*went down into the water*”, and that “*they came up out of the water*”. As Luke records this event it appears that he intends for his readers to understand that the Ethiopian was fully submerged, or immersed, in the water. Furthermore, Luke gives no indication that any other understanding of the word βαπτίζω is in view.

Returning to Jesus’ words in Matthew 29:19-20, we also believe that the grammar that Matthew writes with, as he records Jesus’ command, indicates triune immersion. In

⁵ Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985.

⁶ vol. 1, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. Gerhard Kittel et al.;, electronic ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 529.

⁷ Plaster, David. *Baptism by Triune Immersion*: Grace Theological Journal 6.2 (1985) pg. 383

⁸ Emphasis mine.

verse 19 the definite article, "the," is repeated three times. Once before the Father, once before the Son, and once before the Holy Spirit. Consequently, we take the repeated use of the definite article to mean that there should be one act of immersion for each member of the Trinity.

In conclusion, we believe that triune immersion best pictures trinitarian salvation, and that there are historical, doctrinal, and grammatical reasons to support our convictions regarding the practice of triune immersion. Nevertheless, while our conviction is that triune immersion best pictures trinitarian salvation we do not desire to divide ourselves against other brothers and sisters who may practice believer's baptism by another means.