

Pauline Epistles

A brief evaluation of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church's Doctrine of Baptism in the light of Pauline Baptismal Theology

by Conrad Vine.

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Introduction

This paper will seek to compare and evaluate SDA and Pauline baptismal theologies using the following methodology: 1) an outline of central concepts in Pauline baptismal theology; 2) an outline of SDA official baptismal theology¹; and 3) a brief evaluation of SDA baptismal theology in the light of Pauline baptismal theology².

¹ Given the central missiological thrust within the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) church's organizational purpose and activity (a global emphasis on evangelism and subsequent baptism), it might be expected that the SDA church would have a highly defined baptismal theology.

² Baptism can be one of the most joyous moments in a believer's life, yet the practice, understanding and theology of baptism differ widely across communions.

Pauline Baptismal Theology

Key concepts³ in Pauline baptismal theology may be outlined thus:

*Cleansing from sin*⁴: Paul typifies baptism as a cleansing bath in which we are cleansed by God from sin⁵. In 1 Cor. 6:9-11⁶, the former sins of the church are outlined⁷, but ‘you had yourselves washed from sin’, affirming the faith-related nature of baptism for believers⁸. Baptism is a symbol of, and means for, salvation, in which the believer’s sins are washed away in both ‘the ethical and in the forensic sense⁹’. We are ‘justified’ and ‘sanctified’ in baptism, i.e. God is the primary actor in baptism, and the spiritual realities of justification and sanctification are appropriated by the believer in baptism through faith^{10 11}. Christ is the author of this cleansing, baptism is His instrument^{12 13}.

³ Paul does not present anywhere a complete and systematic presentation and exposition of his theology of baptism (Romans 6:1-14 is as close as Paul gets), rather he often presupposes an understanding amongst church members of the significance of baptism, e.g. Romans 6:3, ‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?’ Paul describes the redemptive significance and function of baptism in several ways throughout his writings, each of which contributes to his overall baptismal theology.

⁴ See 1 Cor. 6:11, Eph. 5:26 and Titus 3:5.

⁵ It is interesting to note the use of middle and passive voices in Eph. 5:26.

⁶ Some exegetes deny that this text refers explicitly to baptism per se, particularly as Paul is therefore linking baptism with justification and sanctification. However, as Beasley-Murray points out in ‘Baptism in the New Testament’, p. 163, there are convincing reasons why this text does refer to baptism, and these reasons are accepted by the majority of scholars and exegetes.

⁷ According to the text, the former sins of the congregation in Corinth included fornication, idolatry, adultery, male prostitution, sodomy, theft, greed, drunkenness, revelries and robbery.

⁸ The use of the middle voice for ‘you had yourselves washed’ implies the elements of personal choice and faith on the part of the believers concerned. They were not the passive recipients of a washing, but voluntarily chose, in baptism, to be washed by God. The clear inter-relationship between baptism and faith for Paul is explored later.

⁹ Ridderbos, H. ‘Paul: An Outline of his Theology’, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1975), p. 397.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 6:11 uses passives for ‘sanctified’ and ‘justified’, emphasizing the pre-eminent role of God in baptism. For Paul, baptism is not primarily an act that a believer does, and in which a believer takes for him/herself spiritual benefits, but an activity in which the believer participates by faith, believing that in so doing God will act to wash away the believer’s sins, to justify and to sanctify the believer.

¹¹ The bonds with a sinful past have been dissolved, slavery to sin is finished, sin is forgiven, guilt is no more, and there is grace to continue forsaking the old ways.

¹² See Eph. 5:26. This cleansing by Christ in baptism is for both the individual believer, and for the church as a whole, and thus functions as a means by which Christ cleanses and prepares the church to be His bride.

¹³ Baptism as washing is also to be understood within the framework of God’s eschatological activity, representing the new birth to a life lived with the Holy Spirit. Cf. Titus 3:5. From the context of this verse, we may understand baptism as washing within the overall framework of God’s salvific activities on our behalf, through which, and in combination with the ‘renewal of the Holy Spirit’, God brings salvation.

*Baptism in / by the Holy Spirit*¹⁴: 1 Cor. 12:13 refers to baptism either “in” or “by” one Spirit¹⁵ ¹⁶. Pauline theology supports the early Christian baptismal understanding¹⁷, in which the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has an eschatological purpose¹⁸ as the first-fruits of our future inheritance in the Kingdom of God. For Paul, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is associated with the laying on of the name of Jesus on a believer during the rite of baptism by water¹⁹, during which the old life to sin dies, and the believer arises under the Holy Spirit’s aegis. Through baptism into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, all social distinctions disappear, the individual believer receives gifts for the edification of the church²⁰, and is ‘sealed’²¹ ²².

¹⁴ Key texts for this aspect of baptism are 1 Cor. 12:13, 2 Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1:13-14, and Eph. 4:30.

¹⁵ Continental expositors tend to favour the translation “in one Spirit”, whilst English expositors have tended to favor “by one Spirit”. Within the immediate context of the Spirit’s agency within the church, the translation “by one Spirit” would seem to be a better translation. To most Christians, the debate about whether the Spirit is the agent of baptism or the element in which one is baptized into the Body of Christ seems rather academic. However, the question does raise a more significant issue: is Paul speaking about baptism as a euphemism for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believer, or whether he is speaking about actual baptism itself? Does Paul have a theology of two baptisms – one of water, and a subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit?

¹⁶ This raises the question of whether Paul understands baptism per se to be the time and place when the Holy Spirit is given to the believer, or whether following the baptism in water there is a later outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

¹⁷ Cf. Mark 1:8, Acts 2:38, John 3:5.

¹⁸ Cf. Joel 2:28, Acts 2:4, 17, Rom. 5:5, Tit. 3:6.

¹⁹ Beasley-Murray in ‘Baptism in the New Testament’ p. 169 outlines some of the key reasons for this understanding of Pauline baptismal theology: 1) in 1 Cor. 6:11 Paul characterizes baptism as being ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God’, a closely related concept to the passage in 1 Cor. 12:13, 2) Acts portrays the apostolic church’s understanding of John’s prediction of the messianic baptism ‘in Spirit’ as being fulfilled in the Pentecost experience and subsequent baptisms by those who responded, 3) Gal. 3:27 links baptism to Christ with baptism to the church, and in 1 Cor. 12:13 there is a similar transition from Christ to the Body, and 4) in both the baptisms of 1 Cor. 12:13 and Gal. 3:27 (baptisms of the spirit and of the church), Paul outlines a subsequent and identical removal of all social barriers and distinctions, hence the identification of the two baptisms being one and the same thing.

²⁰ It is in baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit, and thence we enter the Body of Christ. All members of the Body are thus privileged, removing divisions or elitism within the Body, and removing the potentially divisive need for a further “baptism of the Holy Spirit” for believers. The Holy Spirit gives to various believers different gifts for the edification and building-up of the Body, and although the Body is diverse, it demonstrates an essential unity as it is inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

²¹ At baptism God ‘seals’ the believer with the Holy Spirit as the first installment to the believer of the inheritance of the Kingdom, declaring before the universe that the believer now belongs to Christ, is a new creation, and is no longer under the curse of sin

²² There is some debate about the nature of the sealing that Paul refers to in 2 Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1:13-14, and Eph. 4:30. Some, e.g. Beasley-Murray and Bultmann, argue that there is a direct link between the ‘sealing’ and baptism: in baptism God places a ‘seal’ on us, referring to the passing over to the ownership of Christ from the ownership of sin and Satan of the person who is baptized in Christ’s name, with the giving of the ‘seal’ being the judicial act before the universe that confirms the change in allegiance and standing. Other scholars, e.g. Ridderbos, Schnackenburg and Bouttier, do not see a direct link or allusion

*Baptism Into Christ*²³: In Pauline theology, baptism is both the entrance into the order of life represented by Christ²⁴, and incorporation into His body²⁵. Baptism binds the believer to Christ: the believer puts off the ‘old man’ and puts on the ‘new man’²⁶, i.e. the believer participates in Christ and Christ’s redemptive actions as Christ represents and contains those belonging to Him. Paul does not use mystery religion theology²⁷, nor does he support the spiritual concept of baptism merely symbolizing the believer dying, being buried, and resurrecting to new life²⁸. Through baptism, we participate in a profound way in Christ’s historical-redemptive activities²⁹, the power of sin is broken, we are joined to Christ, and can no longer live to sin³⁰.

between ‘sealing’ and baptism, arguing instead that Paul is primarily referring to the spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit when he refers to ‘sealing’, not to the physical act of baptism per se.

²³ It should be noted that the motif ‘in Christ’ is a major concept throughout all Pauline writings, and that this paper is not the place for an extended discussion of this key motif.

²⁴ Paul seems to relate baptism to Christ’s redemptive activities in the following ways: 1) baptism relates the baptized to Christ’s death and resurrection, involving the believer in Christ’s actual dying and rising, 2) at baptism the estranged sinner is reconciled to God, and he/she begins a new life in Christ, in His Kingdom and in His Spirit, and 3) baptism demands an ongoing denial and crucifixion of the old self and desires through the imparted power of the Holy Spirit.

²⁵ Key texts for these concepts are Rom. 6:3-4, Col. 2:11-12, Gal. 3:27, and Col. 3:9-11.

²⁶ Col. 3:9-11.

²⁷ Some have argued that Paul is utilizing mystery religion concepts, modeling his ‘Christ-myth’ on the existing myths of other gods dying and rising. Such cults were common in the ancient, e.g. the cult of Eleusis, the myth of Demeter and Kore, the Osiris-Osiris cult, the Tammuz cult, the Marduk cult, the Adonis cult, and the Attis cult. However, Wagner and Agersnap both refute the idea that Paul is modeling his baptismal theology on that of the mystery cults, arguing amongst other reasons that a) the initiation rites did not involve a fusion and incorporation of the worshipper with the particular deity, b) the initiation rites did not symbolize a death and resurrection within and to the particular deity, and that c) Paul expressly warns in 1 Cor. 15:29 against viewing baptism as a kind of magical or sacramental act.

²⁸ It is very tempting to read this understanding into Paul’s baptismal theology, however, Paul does not explicitly support this spiritual theological understanding of baptism as a spiritual death to and resurrection from sin.

²⁹ Paul’s arguments in this area are clearly outlined in 1 Cor. 10:2-5, in which he refers to the Israelites as being ‘baptized into Moses’. There is some debate about precisely what Paul is referring to in this passage, but it seems clear that he is enunciating the principle that as the Israelites were saved through being incorporated into God’s salvific acts in time and history through faith in, and following Moses, so the baptized believer is being incorporated into the salvific acts of God in time and history through Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

³⁰ Paul uses the idea of putting off the ‘old man’ and putting on the ‘new man’. Through putting on the new man, we have ethical responsibilities, as we have died to sin. Romans 6:1-13 is based on this idea – how can those who have died to sin, who have put on the new man, ever go back to a life under the power of sin? We are called to a new life, in Christ, having put on the ‘new man’. Baptism is more than a mere parable of a death and resurrection that happened in Palestine over two millennia ago, rather it connects the believer directly to the death and resurrection of Christ. There are some Roman Catholic commentators, e.g. Schnakenburg

Baptism and Faith: for Paul, faith and baptism are closely related as means of salvation³¹. We rise in baptism ‘through faith’³², and are justified by both baptism and faith³³. Faith is the presupposition to baptism, for baptism is the baptism of believers. Faith requires subsequent baptism, whilst baptism requires previous and subsequent faith. However, the subject of baptism is God, not faith. It is God who saves through baptism on the basis of the Christ event and the believer’s faith^{34 35}.

Ethical Implications: Paul is clear about the implications of baptism, particularly in Romans 6:11-14³⁶. As in baptism we have died to sin, were baptized into Christ’s death, and have crucified our old self, then we are to rise to live new lives, no longer under the dominion of sin, in Christ, to God. Previous sinful ways are to be rejected, we are in Christ and are therefore to live righteous lives that honour God. Baptism is therefore not only a single historical event for a believer, but is an ongoing reality and reminder of the beginning of their new life in Christ, their receipt of the Holy Spirit, of their rejection of sin, and their accession to the Kingdom of God and Kingdom values³⁷.

³¹ In Titus 3:5, Paul states that it is through baptism that God saves us, whereas in Eph. 2:8, God saves us through faith.

³² Col. 2:12 states that ‘when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead’.

³³ 1 Cor. 6:11 states that we were justified by baptism, whereas in most Pauline discussions of justification it is solely on the basis of our faith.

³⁴ The passive tenses used in Titus 3:5 and Eph. 5:26 show the actions of God as the agent for, and bringer of, salvation. See footnote 8 above for further discussion.

³⁵ ‘Baptism and faith are both means to the appropriation of the content of the gospel. However, while faith according to its nature is an act of man, baptism according to its nature is an activity of God and on the part of God. That which the believer appropriates to himself on the proclamation of the gospel God promises and bestows on him in baptism’, (Ridderbos, H. ‘Paul: An Outline of his Theology’, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1975), p. 412).

³⁶ ‘Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace’.

³⁷ Paul’s writings on baptism contain some enigmatic statements, e.g. 1 Cor. 15:29 concerning the ‘baptism of the dead’ (vicarious baptism), and 1 Cor. 7:14 concerning the sanctification of an unbelieving partner within a marriage to a believing partner and the children of such marriages being ‘holy’ (leading to the entire debate about infant baptism). Many scholars, e.g. Karl Barth, Beasley-Murray, have expounded long and in great depth on these topics, particularly on the issue of infant baptism, its efficacy and salvific purpose, and these debates have crossed denominational and confessional lines. However, I believe that these somewhat enigmatic statements should be understood in the light of the more detailed expositions on baptism to be found in Pauline thought, in particular, in the light of the clearer passages in Romans 6:1-12, Gal. 3:26 and Col. 2:11. Whilst these debates are of themselves interesting, I do not believe they relate to the central Pauline theological functions and roles of baptism, namely that of washing and cleansing from sin, of receiving the Holy Spirit, of being incorporated into Christ and into His body with concomitant

ethical and moral implications for subsequent living, and of being an instrument through which God justifies and sanctifies the believer, hence I will not address these somewhat tangential issues in this paper.

SDA Baptismal Theology

The core SDA baptismal theology is succinctly summarized as ‘Fundamental Belief # 14’³⁸, this fundamental doctrine is expounded further in the ‘Summary of Doctrinal Beliefs’³⁹, and is briefly enunciated in a baptismal candidates vows⁴⁰. Some SDA doctrinal textbooks have presented baptism with a relative paucity of information, focusing on a few key aspects of baptism, but not presenting the full complexity of theological import concerning baptism⁴¹, and it is understandable how from these textbooks and the baptismal vows themselves some SDA church members understand baptism primarily as being a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

There has been further exposition of SDA baptismal theology, in which a fuller presentation of foundational SDA baptismal theology is given⁴², moving baptism on from

³⁸ ‘By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion by water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings’, (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 180).

³⁹ ‘Baptism by immersion typifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and openly expresses faith in His saving grace and the renunciation of sin and the world, and is recognized as a condition of entrance into church membership’, (Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual’, 16th edition (2000), p. 212).

⁴⁰ ‘I accept the New Testament teaching of baptism by immersion and desire to be so baptized as a public expression of faith in Christ and His forgiveness of my sins’, (Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual’, 16th edition (2000), p. 34).

⁴¹ As an example, the book ‘Christian Beliefs: Fundamental Biblical Teachings for Seventh-Day Adventist College Classes’, Pacific Press Publishing Association (1959) by T.H. Jemison states on p. 246 that, ‘baptism serves three important purposes: 1) It is a public confession of one’s faith in God and his (i.e. the baptismal candidate’s acceptance) acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour, 2) It signifies that one has already begun the new life in Christ, 3) It is the step by which one enters church fellowship’. Some mention is made of the role of the Holy Spirit in baptism, but this is not seen as a central purpose of baptism. Another textbook demonstrates the same paucity of significance for baptism. ‘Bible Doctrines for Seventh-Day Adventist Colleges’, College Press (1928), by B.J. House, states on p. 217 that, ‘by baptism we are baptized into the death of Jesus....’ and seems to imply in the following quotation from p. 217 that baptism was seen as of secondary in the apostolic era, ‘the uppermost aim in all the work of the apostles was to preach the gospel, while the actual rite of baptism was secondary to this. The apostles were primarily concerned that the people should repent, receive the word of God, believe in Jesus with all their heart, have their sins washed away, and receive the Holy Ghost’.

⁴² This fuller exposition of SDA baptismal theology may be seen in books such as ‘Christ our Salvation: What God does for Us and in Us’, Pacific Press Publishing Association (1980) by Dr. H.K. LaRondelle and

being primarily seen as a public confession of faith to provide a more systematic theological basis for Fundamental Belief # 14⁴³.

The question we are faced with however is whether SDA baptismal theology is consistent with Pauline baptismal theology or not?

'This We Believe: An Overview of the Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists', Pacific Press Publishing Association (1983), by E.R. Gane and L.R. Van Dolson.

⁴³ This richer exposition of foundational SDA baptismal theology contains the following elements:

- In baptism, 'we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (E. Gane & L. Van Olson, 'This We Believe: An Overview of the Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists', Pacific Press Publishing Association (1993), p. 123). Our baptism is not primarily a symbol of our own spiritual death to, and resurrection from, sin, but the means by which enter into and appropriate Christ's own redemptive death and resurrection, and through faith in His righteousness we are justified.
- In baptism, 'we testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life' (E. Gane & L. Van Olson, 'This We Believe: An Overview of the Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists', Pacific Press Publishing Association (1993), p. 123). We express our repentance and conversion from a life of sin, and our desire to live in Christ and for Christ as a new creation.
- In baptism, 'we acknowledge Christ as our Lord and Saviour' (E. Gane & L. Van Olson, 'This We Believe: An Overview of the Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists', Pacific Press Publishing Association (1993), p. 123), entering into a new covenant relationship with God.
- In baptism, 'we are received as members by His church' (E. Gane & L. Van Olson, 'This We Believe: An Overview of the Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists', Pacific Press Publishing Association (1993), p. 123). We enter into the Body of Christ, His church, with concomitant privileges and responsibilities.
- In baptism, 'God also acts, uniting our souls with Christ, clothing us with Christ's righteousness, equipping us with the power of the Holy Spirit, and declaring before the universe that we have become children of the heavenly King, members of the royal family and of the church of Christ' (H.K. LaRondelle, 'Christ Our Salvation: What God does for Us and in Us', Pacific Press Publishing Association (1980), p. 56). God acts redemptively in baptism in response to the believer's faith.
- In baptism, God cleanses us of our sins.
- In baptism by water we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, equipping us with special gifts and power for the edification of the church and proclamation of the gospel.
- Baptism presupposes faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice as the only means of salvation from sin, confession, repentance, and fruits of repentance.

Comparative Evaluation

Cleansing from sin: both Fundamental Belief # 14 and the baptismal vows include the concept of forgiveness of sin, for which baptism is either a ‘symbol’, or a ‘public confession’. Whilst not of themselves fully reflecting the actual divine cleansing from sin within Pauline baptism, the exposition of Fundamental Belief # 14 states that, ‘the baptismal ceremony is a demonstration of an inner cleansing – the washing away of sins that have been confessed’⁴⁴, a theology consistent with the Pauline understanding of God’s acting to cleanse within baptism.

SDA theology⁴⁵ however does not seem to go as far as the Pauline theology in explicitly understanding the simultaneous actions of God to justify and sanctify at the time of cleansing from sin, i.e. baptism, due I believe to a lack of depth in public theological statements rather than a fundamental divergence of theological understanding⁴⁶.

Baptism in / by the Holy Spirit: Fundamental Belief # 14 states that baptism is a symbol of ‘our reception of the Holy Spirit’⁴⁷, with a further exposition that baptism by water and ‘Spirit baptism belong together, that a baptism void of the reception of the Holy Spirit is void’⁴⁸. Furthermore, SDA theology supports the Pauline concept of the equipping nature

⁴⁴ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 185.

⁴⁵ I am referring exclusively to the texts and official statements mentioned, not to a broader SDA understanding of baptism which may well include these very concepts.

⁴⁶ There may also be some difference of opinion with Paul as to the exact moment that a repentant believer is justified by God. Some may understand justification to happen when a believer, repents and confesses Jesus as Lord, an event that will precede baptism, rather than justification happening by God before the assembled universe over and against the claims of Satan at baptism. The exposition however of Fundamental Belief # 14 does state that ‘the Holy Spirit prepares us for this ministry by purifying our hearts from sin....the Holy Spirit will purify the lives of all who surrender to Him, consuming their sins’ (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 187). Within the given context of receiving the Holy Spirit at baptism, it would therefore seem that there is SDA theological support for the Pauline understanding of being cleansed by God of our sins at baptism, albeit indirect support.

⁴⁷ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 180.

⁴⁸ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 187.

of Spirit baptism for the edification of the church, and of the believer's new life being lived within the government of the Holy Spirit⁴⁹. Whilst there is an essential unity of thought therefore concerning Spirit baptism, SDA theology does not go into as great depth as Pauline theology⁵⁰.

Baptism Into Christ: SDA theology concurs with Pauline theology in a number of key areas: baptism primarily symbolizes our participation in, and union with, the historical-redemptive death and resurrection of Christ rather than symbolizing our own death to sin; baptism is the means of entrance into the body of Christ (the church); in baptism we appropriate, and are in union with, Christ's redemptive acts; being in Christ 'enables us to walk in newness of life'⁵¹; and baptism represents the spiritual circumcision necessary in the new covenant of grace⁵². SDA theology does not exhibit the same pregnancy of theological import as Pauline theology, but it does exhibit the same clear unity of thought.

Baptism and Faith: SDA theology concurs with Pauline theology in a number of key areas: faith is a pre-requisite to baptism⁵³; faith of itself can not save – faith saves only if it is in Jesus Christ and His redemptive activities; faith demands baptism; and baptism is

⁴⁹ 'In the apostolic church the outpouring of the Holy Spirit generally followed water baptism. So today, when we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are dedicated, consecrated, and united with the great powers of heaven and to the spreading of the everlasting gospel.....then the Holy Spirit provides them with His gifts. His gifts are a special divine endowment, given at the time of baptism, to enable the believer to serve the church and to minister to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit gave the early church the power to witness (Acts 1:5,8), and only that same baptism will enable the church to complete its mission of proclaiming the everlasting gospel of the Kingdom' (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 'Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines', Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 187).

⁵⁰ Particularly concerning the significance of Spirit baptism, particularly the concepts of being sealed by God, of baptism within an eschatological context, and of Spirit baptism being a down-payment, or 'earnest', of the Kingdom.

⁵¹ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 'Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines', Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 185.

⁵² Col. 2:11,12

⁵³ 'One prerequisite for baptism is a faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice as the only means of salvation from sin' (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 'Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines', Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 187).

‘contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus’⁵⁴. However, the SDA statements do not emphasize the Pauline corollary to the believer’s role, that God acts salvifically through cleansing, justifying and sanctifying at baptism. This, as above, does not seem to represent a divergence of theological thought, more a lack of theological depth in the official statements⁵⁵.

Ethical Implications: As above, SDA theology concurs with Pauline theology in the following areas: believers renounce sin at baptism because they are now in Christ, confessing their purpose to ‘walk in newness of life’⁵⁶; baptism is the witness of true repentance; and baptism has an ongoing impact, bringing forth fruit in lives lived for Christ, for Christ’s church, and for the world⁵⁷. SDA theology links a baptismal vow to ‘renounce the sinful ways of the world’ with accepting Jesus as one’s ‘Lord and personal Saviour’⁵⁸ rather than the Pauline link with the fact of having been baptized into Christ and Christ’s death, but this is a difference of emphasis rather than of substance.

⁵⁴ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 180.

⁵⁵ It is clear that SDA theologians do understand and affirm the salvific role played by God in baptism, as seen in footnote # 39, but this balanced and ‘multiple-player’ view of the actors within baptism is not emphasized within the official baptismal theological statements.

⁵⁶ Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 180.

⁵⁷ ‘The final fruit is a life lived in and for the world. It is true that we who have been baptized hold our citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20). But we have been called out of the world simply to be trained within the body of Christ to return to the world as servants, participating in Christ’s saving ministry. True disciples will not withdraw from the world into the church; we are born into Christ’s kingdom as missionaries. Faithfulness to our baptismal covenant involves leading others into the kingdom of grace’ (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines’, Review and Herald Publishing Association (1988), p. 190).

⁵⁸ ‘I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and personal Saviour and believe that God, in Christ, has forgiven my sins and given me a new heart, and I renounce the sinful ways of the world’, (Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, ‘Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual’, 16th edition (2000), p. 33).

Conclusion

SDA theology could further reflect Pauline baptismal theology were it to explicitly address the following issues:

- Recognize more the active and central role played by God in baptism, in addition to focusing on the personal beliefs and intentions of the believer.
- Recognize more the eschatological and ‘sealing’ aspects of Holy Spirit baptism.
- Recognize more the import of becoming ‘in Christ’ at baptism, with the concomitant ethical implications.

However, given the breadth and depth of Pauline baptismal thought, and despite the relative lack of depth in the SDA theology assessed⁵⁹, I believe there is essential unity of thought and understanding between SDA baptismal theology and the basic concepts of Pauline baptismal theology (as outlined).

⁵⁹ As above, SDA theology in general has a great depth and breadth, but for the purposes of this evaluation I am defining ‘SDA theology’ exclusively as those public statements outlined above.

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