

A Study of the Trinity in Form of Baptism in Matthew 28:19-20

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ABSTRACT: The Bible records differences in the formula of baptism. As Jesus taught in Matthew 28:19, those who believe should be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, in some parts of the Bible, the disciples command every believer to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This study tries to describe the formula of baptism taught by Jesus. It is a descriptive research and used the Bible, books, and journals as the main sources. It is concluded that the formula of baptism in the name of Jesus does not contradict His teachings. However, because Jesus Himself taught that baptism must be in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in practice, it is better to use the formula He had taught.

Key words: Trinity, Great Commission, Gospel of Matthew 28:19-20

Article History:

Submitted: March 30, 2022

Revised: July 26, 2022

Published: July 30, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The faithful's commitment to follow Christ is shown in baptism, as commanded by Jesus in His Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19, it is written that baptism should be carried out in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Darmawan, 2019; Turner, 1978). These prerequisites clearly require Trinitarian mention. Moltmann (1974) said that there is a method of baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By referring to this opinion, Thianto (2013) further explained that the Trinitarian mention coincides with an eschatological history of God himself directed to the future. Meanwhile, Westminster Confession of Faith stated that baptism should involve three persons of God (the Trinity) in its implementation as the important formula, based on the teachings in Matthew 28:19 (as stated in Kaligis & Manogu, 2020; Williamson, 1970, 2004).

In the practice of baptism, however, some churches only mention "in the name of Jesus" (Balang & Setiawan, 2021). This is based on several biblical texts, namely: 1) Acts 2:38 "...be baptized

every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...."; 2) Acts 8:16 "...be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ"; 3) Acts 10:48 "...baptized in the name of the Lord"; and 4) Acts 19:5 "...they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus". In Acts 8:16, baptism was performed to the faithful there as a form of witnessing that the baptized belongs to Christ.

Nevertheless, this seeming "contradiction" strongly influences the view of churches today regarding the theology of Trinity. For example, Liauw (2021) believed that the Father is actually Jesus. Nicolas, Manaroinson, and Siahaan (2021) revealed that the Oneness adherents who believe in Sabellianism believe that Jesus is a manifestation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In correlation with baptism as in Matthew 28:29, they further explained that Oneness adherents interpret that the (singular) names of each person in the Trinity is interchangeable to the name of Jesus and that baptism performed in this format is still valid.

According to Liauw (2021), in the Old Testament context, many people could not see the

Father. This means that people in the Old Testament who had seen God, had actually seen Jesus Christ. Old Testament people knew that God the Father as YHWH, which means "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). Relating to this, the name of Jesus in Hebrew is *Yehoshua*, a compound of YHWH (interpreted here as Yah), and a Hebrew word meaning *to save*. Thus, Jesus means *YHWH who saves* (Elwell, 2001; Saner, 2015; Sonnet, 2010; Thiessen, 2006).

This "inconsistency" issue needs to be studied since previous studies do not sufficiently examine it. Research by Harefa (2020) was directed at the relationship between baptism and soteriology. Researches by Sumiwi (2018) and Stevanus & Panjaitan (2020) dealt with baptism and the Holy Spirit, but did not profoundly analyze the Trinity in baptism, especially with regards to Matthew 28:19. Research by Djadi (2014) examined the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Other research examined the theological history of baptism in the intertestamental period (Kuswanto, 2020). In short, these researches did not analyze Matthew 28:19-20 in its relation to the formula of baptism.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Darmawan (2019) examined Matthew 28:19-20. However, the research failed to examine the use of Trinitarian formula in baptism, even though it focused on baptism. Research by Tanduklangi (2020) only examined the goals of educating Christians on Matthew 28:19-20. It did not concretely discuss the use of Trinitarian name in the text of Matthew 28:19-20. Likewise, Hartono's (2018) research emphasized the actualization of Matthew 28:19-20 in the context of the digital era. Fitriyana and Murtiningsih (2019) focused their research on the synergy between evangelism of the Great Commission and baptism based on Matthew 28:19, but failed to address the issue of baptism formula. It is therefore concluded that the issue of Trinitarian language usage in baptism had not been discussed in depth. In practice, this causes confusion among Christians.

Nicolas and Amtiran (2021) showed that

theological problems, including the Trinity, need to be solved so as not to cause bias. They revealed that the command of baptism in Matthew 28:19 is still valid until today, but the dynamics and debates surrounding it still arise. The difficulty of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity has led to debates that affect the practice of ministry (Nicolas et al., 2021). Therefore, the Trinitarian formula of baptism needs to be studied theologically, whose results in turn can contribute scientifically in the field of theology, especially in the doctrine of God.

This study examines the concept of the Trinity in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 as a formula of baptism taught by Jesus Himself to His disciples before He ascended to heaven.

METHOD

This study is theological research that examined biblical texts. This study used descriptive qualitative method based on biblical hermeneutic approach. The biblical hermeneutic approach is a theological study that seeks to discover the meaning of biblical texts in light of their current context (Elliston, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2018). The text studied in this research was Matthew 28:19-20. This research employed the Bible as its primary data source, especially with regards to theology. Other data sources used in this research were commentaries, Bible encyclopedias, and journal articles related to the Trinity theme in the Great Commission. The author collected the meaning of the term "Trinity" in a general context, then explore the textual meaning of Matthew 28:19, especially regarding the Three Persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Analysis results were then presented in a thematic-descriptive manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Invocation of God in Baptism

In general, in performing the sacrament of baptism, a minister of God will invoke the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as part of

confession of true faith and as a form of surrendering the baptized to the Divine, associated by the Trinity. However, it is undeniable that differences are found when comparing the Bible to the teachings of the Apostles that at first glance are quite controversial. One of them relates to the invocation of the Trinitarian formula in baptism. The following are the formula of baptism in several New Testament books:

| Scripture | Formula of Baptism |
|------------|--|
| Mat. 28:19 | ... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost |
| Act. 2:38 | ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins |
| Act. 8:16 | ... only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. |
| Act.10:48 | ... he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord |
| Act.19:5 | ... they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. |

Table 1. The Formula of Baptism in Several New Testament

The table shows that only in Matthew it is said that baptism was performed in the name of God in three Persons. Meanwhile, the account in Acts only mentions the name of Jesus. Godly invocation in baptism in the name of Jesus theologically signifies that He is the owner of life. Herawati (2014) explained that Godly invocation is not intended as a baptism formula, but rather as a theological depiction of the meaning of baptism sacrament. The Godly invocation relates to the concept of the Trinity. Church fathers developed the Trinity doctrine by means of the Council of Constantinople, which, according to St. Augustine, was held for apologetic purposes against various heresies (Objantoro, 2020; van Niftrik & Boland, 2014). The Trinity, according to St. Augustine, is active in all of His divine acts, and the three Persons are distinct from one another since their eternal existence (Augustine et al., 1990; Suryaningsih, 2019). The acknowledgment of a Trinitarian Christian God was a response to the love of the

Father, the historical reality of Jesus Christ, and the experience of the Holy Spirit (Wan, 2010, p. 181).

Even so, the singular Godly invocation in baptism, as in Acts, is argued to be inconsistent with the Unitarian concept. Unitarians reject Trinity and claim the oneness of God (Wellem, 2004; Wilbur, 1952). The invocation of Jesus' name in baptism as recorded in Acts did not mean to contradict Matthew 28:19-20. Pfeiffer & Harrison (2013) argued that in the context of Acts 2:38, Jews at that time understood that water baptism is evidence of repentance. Then, the baptism performed in the name of Jesus is a form of acknowledgment to His status as the Savior of these people (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 2013; Stamps, 1984). The faithful who put their faith in Christ will then personally receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is argued that there was no inconsistency in the accounts of Matthew and Acts, since each of them has its own context, which essentially refers back to God.

Trinity as Formula of Baptism in Matthew 28:19-20

Singular invocation of the Trinity

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1:26, God spoke to Himself at the time of creation. God refers to Himself by the words "I" as well as "We". In Isaiah 6:8, it is written that God refers to Himself as "I" and "We". In this case, Lee (2020) concluded that God calls Himself "I" and "We", which means "I" is "We", and "We" is "I". Responding to the Gospel of Matthew, Lee (2020) said that the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit mean that God is One essence in three persons. Sunarko (2017) said that in the first covenant of Wisdom, the Word and the Spirit were personalized as actors of divine activities.

In John 14:23, Jesus makes a fairly clear statement about the divine personal connection. Jesus said "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." He then

clarified it further in His prayer in John 17:11, "Holy Father...that they may become one like us". Aside from clarification, the statement even shows the relationship intricacies of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This divine, supernatural, and infinite manifestation of God consists of three Persons, namely the Father, the Son or the Word, and the Holy Spirit. All three have the same substance, power, and eternity, each possessing the entire divine essence without this essence being divided. The Father is not created and begotten from anyone. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. These three are infinite, have no beginning, and are one, who is indivisible in nature and existence. However, all three are distinguished by some distinctive characteristics and personal relationships. This Trinitarian truth is the foundation of faith to all of the faithful and becomes their comfort.

If the underlying context of the Bible is investigated, it speaks about the history of redemption. God created man in His own image (Gen 1:26-27), empowering them with dominion over the entire universe. Due to Adam and Eve's disobedience, the whole creation became corrupted, and a state of separation existed between God and man, since holiness cannot be united with sinfulness. The redemption Jesus brought was the way to establish cosmic reconciliation. Since salvation can only be given by someone as holy as God (Park, 2011), it is concluded that the Person of Jesus is truly God who came into the world, as described in Philippians 2:5-6. In this way, Jesus' equality with the Godhood is undeniable, since only a wholly holy Being – God – can pay the debts of sin.

In Matthew 28:19, Godly invocation uses the formula "... in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..." Lee (2020) stated that in Greek, this invocation uses the singular form, which he then calls "a mystery". Although there are three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

they all are united under one title. It is in line with 1 Corinthians 8:4 that there is no other God but the one God. This notion echoes the Old Testament concept shown in Isaiah 45:5, 6, 21, 22 and Psalm 86:10, which emphasizes the oneness of God. Henry (1985) explains that baptism is carried out by invoking the name (*eis to onoma*) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which means acknowledging the oneness of God. The same explanation is also given by Lee (2020), that the invocation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit means that God is One in His essence. This has to do with doctrinal beliefs about the Trinity.

The term "Trinity" itself is never to be found in the Bible. However, analysis of certain texts results in the fact that there is a relationship between the three names that cannot be separated, such as the account of Baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16-17. In analyzing this event, Stamps (2022) show the Trinitarian manifestation as follows: 1) Jesus Christ, the God incarnate, being baptized in the Jordan River (John 10:30), 2) the Holy Spirit descended from above – the place of the Father – upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22); and 3) the Father Himself declared that he was pleased with Jesus. Other accounts of the Gospel also clearly state that Jesus carried out all of His mission, namely teaching, preaching the gospel, and healing people who were in bad condition with the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1; John 3:34).

Trinitarian invocation reveals God's Holy Work

According to Henry (2008) and Darmawan (2019), the invocation of baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit means that it is not performed by human might, but by divine power. Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:13 said, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." Henry (2017) explained that this closing statement is common to end a worship service. He believed that there is evidence for the mention of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being

the forms of three different persons but one God. The three Persons are believed to indicate the source of all blessings for humans. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 shows the existence of a Personal unity that cannot be separated. One Spirit bestows various gifts, and no one can profess that Jesus is God except the Holy Spirit, who is in every believer.

Henry (2008) explains that the invocation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit means that through prayer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all things are sanctified. The invocation also means that in baptism there is a holy presence of God. Through the Trinitarian invocation, it is stated that salvation can only be given by a Holy Being, like God himself (Park, 2011, p. 25).

Trinitarian invocation in the unity of the Person of God

The invocation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in baptism reflects the Personal unity of each Person to each other. Henry (2008) explained that by invoking "the Father" in baptism, an acknowledgement that this Person is the Father of Jesus Christ, the redeemer of the faithful from sin, is made. It does not mean that Jesus has a lower position than the Father, as interpreted by the Jehovah's Witnesses (Aliyanto, 2019; Ismail, 2018). The invocation of the Father's name as taught in Matthew 28:19 shows that the forgiveness of sins received by the faithful is a gift from God the Father as revealed in Jesus (Calvin, 1996).

Next, the mention of "the Son" means that baptism is a special way performed in the name of Jesus (Calvin, 1996; Henry, 2008). In baptism, the faithful confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

the living God (Matt. 16:16) and that Jesus is Lord and God (John 20:28). The invocation of Jesus's name shows the recognition of God's salvation work for all man through Jesus (Susanti, 2019).

The mention of the third Person, the Holy Spirit, implies that the faithful have confidence in the Holy Spirit as one of God's Persons who also works in the story of the faithful's redemption. By mentioning the name of the Holy Spirit, the faithful surrender themselves to the direction and work of the Holy Spirit, who has sanctified, taught, guided, and comforted them (Henry, 1985, 2008).

The mention of the three Persons of God in baptism as taught in Matthew 28:19 emphasizes that none of these Persons is lower or higher to each other. All Persons of the Trinity are involved and work for human salvation from sin. In this way, the work of salvation is a Trinitarian work by itself and not just the work of one Person.

CONCLUSION

In essence, baptism in the name of Jesus taught by Jesus' disciples did not contradict the teachings of Jesus. The disciples performed baptism with a different formula than those of Jesus', but still they saw a unified counsel of God in the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus himself. However, since the doctrine of Trinity exists and takes root in Christian life, even though not all Christians understand its meaning, the author takes a position that baptism by invoking the Trinitarian formula to be more acceptable, based on the understanding that it is taught by Jesus himself.

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