

# The Doctrine of Baptism

DOCTRINAL SERIES





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## **TRUE JESUS CHURCH**

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ISBN: 1-930264-13-5

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# Introduction

To baptize disciples of all nations is a direct command of our risen Lord Jesus (Mt 28:18–20); and, to be baptized is a calling of our Lord to all who believe in Him and the gospel that offers the promise of salvation (Mk 16:15–16). Wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, His baptism must follow. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus must be baptized. Baptism is so integral to the proclamation of God's kingdom and faith in Christ that it is inseparable from conversion.

The baptism of John the Baptist paved the way for the New Testament baptism. His baptism was a divine institution from heaven (Mt 21:23–25). It was preached alongside the call to repentance and was received with the confession of sins. The acceptance of John's baptism was equated with the acceptance of the will of God (Lk 7:28–30).

When the Lord Jesus came, He was also baptized (Mt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 21–22; Jn 1:32–34). The baptism of Jesus has a profound significance in the Gospels and for all believers. Through Jesus' act of obedience, God revealed Him to all Israel as the beloved Son. His submission to God, which fulfilled all righteousness on behalf of mankind, established a prime example for us to also submit to God's will through baptism.

Having received the commission to baptize, the Lord gave the disciples authority to forgive and retain sins through the promised Holy Spirit (Jn 20:21–23). When the Holy Spirit was poured out after Jesus' ascension, the church went forth into the world to preach the gospel and to baptize in accordance to the Lord's command. Through baptism believers were added to the church. Baptismal accounts of individuals as well as households are consistently recorded in the missionary and conversion narratives in the Book of Acts.



In the apostolic writings, it is understood that all believers in Christ were baptized (Rom 6:3–4; 1Cor 6:11; 12:13; Gal 3:27; Col 2:11–13; Tit 3:5; 1Pet 3:21). It is also important to note that the apostles taught and expounded the purpose, effect, and meaning of baptism. Through baptism the blood of Christ washes away the sins of the believer (Acts 2:38; 22:16) and thus the body of sin is put off (Rom 6:1–7; Col 2:11–12). By way of baptism, the remission of sins and numerous spiritual blessings, such as rebirth (Jn 3:3–5; Tit 3:5; Rom 6:1–11; Col 2:11–12), justification and sanctification (1Cor 6:11), putting on of Christ (Gal 3:27), sonship (Gal 3:26–29), and salvation (Mk 16:16; Tit 3:5; 1Pet 3:21) come to the believer. Baptism is so vital to God’s saving grace and faith in Christ that the Scriptures always speak of salvation in relation to it. Baptism is of grace and faith, and not of works.

Today, the church continues the work of the early church. By the authority of the Holy Spirit, it baptizes believers who are obedient to the Lord’s commission. The Lord’s promise of salvation to those who believe and are baptized still stands now just as it was true then. Wherever the gospel is preached in the world, believers are called to be baptized into Christ and His body, in order to receive eternal life and all the gifts of grace promised to the heirs of God’s kingdom.

This section provides a systematic presentation of the doctrine of baptism. The objective is to help you gain a clear understanding of the role of baptism in the Bible as well as its meaning and necessity for believers. In addition, a thorough discussion of its administration aims to shed light on how the church is to carry out the command to baptize. Wherever a passage is examined extensively in the exegetical studies section, it would be beneficial to also refer to its corresponding commentary as indicated in the footnotes.

# Chapter 1

## THE FORESHADOWERS OF BAPTISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

While the institution of the Christian baptism is a divine ordinance unique to the New Testament church, it is not without its precedence in the Old Testament. Concepts essential to baptism, including remission of sins, washing with water, and atonement by blood, are all rooted in the Old Testament.

### A. WASHING WITH WATER

#### 1. God's requirement for cleanliness

The purpose of God's election is for His chosen people to be a holy nation (Ex 19:6). As evident in His laws to the Israelites, one of God's chief concerns for his people is their cleanliness. In the book of Leviticus, the theme of cleanliness clearly occupies a dominant place.

The requirements for cleanliness begin with the service at the tent of meeting. Great care is to be taken to ensure that no holy thing is defiled by anything unclean. Only those who are clean may eat of the flesh of the sacrifice (Lev 7:19–21; 22:4–7; Num 18:13). Any priest who profanes the offerings of the people by coming near them while they are unclean would be cut off from God's presence (Lev 22:1–3). The remains of sacrifices are to be disposed of in a clean place (Lev 4:11–12; 6:10–11). The flesh of the sacrifice that has touched anything unclean must not be eaten (Lev 7:19).

The demand for cleanliness extends outward from the sanctuary to the daily life of every Israelite. God gave specific laws

on distinguishing the clean and the unclean animals, birds, fish, and insects (Lev 11). Only the clean creatures may be consumed for food. Touching the carcasses of either the clean or unclean creatures causes one to become unclean. Other sources of uncleanness include childbirth (Lev 12), skin ailments (Lev 13–14), mildew (Lev 14), and bodily discharges (Lev 15). The law further prescribes in meticulous detail the steps in purifying from uncleanness.

Along with the numerous regulations on cleanliness, the LORD entrusted to Aaron and his sons the duty of discerning and teaching:

*Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses. (Lev 10:9–11)*

The purpose of maintaining the cleanliness of the Israelites is twofold. First, preserving their cleanliness ensures the sanctity of God's dwelling and the safety of the people, as we can see in the LORD's command to Moses and Aaron:

*Thus you shall separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness when they defile My tabernacle that is among them. (Lev 15:31)*

Second, the laws of cleanliness, together with the ethical demands God has also laid down, set the chosen race apart from other nations to be holy unto the LORD:

*You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine. (Lev 20:25–26)*

a. Purification rites

In addition to stipulating what constitutes as uncleanness, the law further prescribes in great detail the methods for purification. Washing with water, sometimes followed by a sacrifice, is a dominant feature of these purification rites.

i. Cleansing from uncleanness

In most cases of uncleanness, cleansing involves washing the body in water and the washing of clothes. These include cleansing from carcasses (Lev 11:25, 28, 39–40; 17:15–16), skin ailments (Lev 13:6), leprosy (Lev 14:8–9, 47), bodily discharge (Lev 15:1–13, 16–22, 25–27; Deut 23:10–11), and touching or being near a corpse (Num 19:19). Items that have become unclean are also to be washed in water (Lev 11:32; 13:53–54, 58; 15:17).

The men who had gone to the battle are to wash their clothes on the seventh day in order to be clean and to return to the camp. All articles that can endure fire are to be put through the fire and be purified with water. Other articles may be put through water only. (Num 31:21–24)

If a priest goes near the holy things while he is unclean, it constitutes profaning the LORD's name and he is subject to death (Lev 22:1–9). Whoever touches anything by which he would made unclean must not eat the holy offerings unless he washes his body with water. And when the sun goes down he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat the holy offerings (Lev 22:4–7).

The law generally does not specify what kind of water to use for cleansing, except in one instance where it explicitly prescribes the washing of the body with running (or living) water (Lev 15:13). Two particular purification rites entailed the use water that is specially prepared. Running water, along with the blood of a bird, is one of the elements in the cleansing from leprosy (Lev 14:1–8; 48–53). Running water mixed with the ashes of heifer burnt for purification is to be sprinkled on the persons

or objects that have touched or been near the dead (Num 19:17, 18).

ii. Preparatory washing

In addition to cleansing from uncleanness, washing with water is also for the purpose of preparation for drawing near God's presence. Even when no particular impurities are introduced, washing is necessary on such occasions.

The LORD commanded Moses to set up the tent of meeting and to consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. He said to Moses, "And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water" (Ex 29:4; 40:12). Having washed them, Moses was to put on them the priestly garments, make offerings for them, and perform on them rituals that involved the application of blood. So Moses did as he was commanded (Lev 8:6–30).

The consecration of the Levites likewise involves purification with water as the first step in the cleansing process. The LORD told Moses to sprinkle water of purification on them and to let them shave themselves and wash their clothes to become clean (Num 8:5–7). And so the Levites purified themselves (v. 20–21).

Washing is required of priests before they draw near to God to minister:

*Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the Lord, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations." (Ex 30:17–21; cf. 40:30–32)*

After the death of Aaron's two sons, God instructed Moses that Aaron was not to enter the Holy Place and come before the mercy seat just any time lest he die. On the Day of Atonement, before putting on the holy garments and offering the offerings, Aaron is to wash his body in water first (Lev 16:4).

Other than the preparatory washing of priests, we read of an instance where washing applied to the entire assembly of Israel. When the Israelites came to the Wilderness of Sinai, the LORD told Moses that He would come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people on the third day. The people must first consecrate themselves and wash their clothes (Ex 19:10, 14). Thus washing with water serves a sanctifying purpose for the people in this unique historical event.

### iii. Washing after a rite

The LORD also stipulated washing on certain occasions during a priestly rite even though no explicit impurities are mentioned.

The priest who slaughters the red heifer used for purification is to wash his clothes and bathe in water after the burning of the heifer (Num 19:7). The one who burns the heifer shall wash his clothes in water and bathe in water (v. 8). The man who gathers up the ashes of the heifer as well as he who sprinkles the water of purification on the unclean shall also wash their clothes (v. 10, 21).

After the completion of the atoning in the Holy Place on the Day of Atonement, Aaron shall wash his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments (Lev 16:24). Both he who releases the scapegoat and he who burns the skins, flesh, and offal of the sacrificial animals need to wash their clothes and bathe their bodies in water (v. 26, 28).

In the process of offering the sin offering, the garment on which any of the offering's blood is sprinkled must be washed in a holy place (Lev 6:27).

2. Washing of water as a metaphor

The washing involved in the temple worship and service underlies the concept of inward, spiritual washing found in the wisdom literature and prophetic teachings. References to washing in this case are metaphorical, with its background in the physical washings prescribed in the law.

The LORD calls out to His people through Isaiah:

*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;  
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.  
Cease to do evil.  
(Isa 1:16).*

A similar message is found in Jeremiah:

*O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness,  
That you may be saved.  
How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?  
(Jer 4:14)*

Proverbs 30:12 speaks of those who remain in wickedness as not having been washed:

*There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes,  
Yet is not washed from its filthiness.*

In his psalm of contrition David writes:

*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,  
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
(Ps 51:6-7)*

The language here is based on the purification rite for the cleansing of a leper, which involves the sprinkling of the blood with cedar wood, the scarlet, and the hyssop as well as washing of the body in water (Lev 14:1-9).

The LORD promises that in the last day He will gather His people, who had been scattered. At that time, He will also cleanse them through the sprinkling of clean water: "Then I

will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezek 36:25). The LORD likewise promises an eschatological cleansing in Zechariah: “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech 13:1). In Isaiah 4, the prophet envisions the day when the LORD will sanctify the remnants of Jerusalem, “When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning” (Isa 4:4).

As we shift our focus from the external washings demanded by the law to the inward washing alluded to by the prophets, we gain an increasing awareness that ultimately cleansing from iniquity is a divine act. It is something God will do for His people. Anyone who longs to be washed of all impurities must turn to God in expectation of the divine washing.

It is also noteworthy that the Spirit will be at work in the cleansing that God will perform, as stated in Isa 4:4. The act of washing away impurities will in fact be an act of God’s Spirit.

## B. ATONEMENT

### 1. Meaning of atonement

The Hebrew root word for “atonement,” כִּפֶּר, means “to cover” (cf. Gen 6:14). However, it does not denote simply hiding something from view. The word also carries a sense of “to annul” or “to make powerless” (cf. Isa 28:18).<sup>1</sup> This is consistent with the meaning of words in other Semitic languages that share the same root, including “to wash away” (Aramaic) and “to purify” (Assyrian).<sup>2</sup>

The Piel form of כִּפֶּר, כִּפְּרָה (translated “atone”), is used mainly in a religious sense. It connotes “removal of guilt” (Lev

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1 J. H. Kurtz, *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 69.

2 Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 497.



10:17). The need for atonement is occasioned by sin, whether it is committed intentionally or in ignorance (Ex 32:30; Lev 4:35; 5:6, 13, 18; 10:17; 16:16, 30; Num 15:28; 16:46, 47; Ps 78:38; Ezek 45:20). Purification from uncleanness also requires atonement, even if no ethical misconduct is involved. This is so in the cases of uncleanness through childbirth (Lev 12:7–8), leprosy (Lev 14:18–21, 29, 31, 53), bodily discharges (Lev 15:15, 30). The result of atonement is the forgiveness of sins and cleansing (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35, 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 12:7, 8; 16:30; 19:22; Num 15:25, 28).

The LORD also requires atonement even for the altar and the Holy Place. After consecrating Aaron and his sons, Moses was to also cleanse and sanctify the altar for seven days by making atonement for it so that the altar becomes most holy (Ex 29:36–37). On the Day of Atonement, Aaron is to bring the blood of the goat of the sin offering inside the veil and make atonement for the Holy Place (Lev 16:15–16). The reason, as the LORD stated, is “because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins” and that the tabernacle “remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness” (Lev 16:16). After making atonement in the Holy Place, Aaron is to go out to the altar and make atonement for it, consecrating it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel (Lev 16:18–19). This statute for making atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar is to be carried out once a year (Lev 16:29–34). In Ezekiel’s vision of the temple, we also read of similar stipulations for making atonement for the altar and the temple (Ezek 43:20, 26; 45:18–20).

## 2. Means of atonement

The making of atonement is a priestly duty, and the one who makes atonement takes on the role of an intercessor or mediator. Moses was the first person recorded in the Scripture who is said to have made atonement. When the LORD’s wrath burned against the Israelites because they had fashioned and worshiped a golden calf, Moses interceded for the people before the LORD. He went up to the LORD to make atonement for their sins (Ex 32:30).

After the erection of the tabernacle of meeting and the institution of the temple worship, atonement was achieved through offerings.<sup>3</sup> This is explicitly stated in the case of the burnt offering (Lev 1:4; 9:7; Num 15:22–25; 28:30), the sin offering (Ex 30:10; Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 9:7; 10:17; Num 15:27, 28; 28:22; 29:5, 11; 2Chron 29:24; Neh 10:33), and the trespass offering (Lev 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22).<sup>4</sup> In addition, the ram offered for reparation is also for atonement (Num 5:8).

The Scripture records that the offerings made on certain occasions effected atonement:

- a. The offerings made for cleansing and the rites associated with them (Lev 12:6–8; 14:18–21, 29, 31, 53; 15:15, 30). In such purification rites, sacrifices for atonement follow the washing with water.
  - b. The sin offerings and burnt offerings on the Day of Atonement for the high priest, his household, the people of Israel, the altar, the tabernacle of meeting, and the Holy Place (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:6, 10, 11, 16–18, 24, 27, 30, 32–34).
  - c. The purification of a defiled Nazirite (Num 6:9–11)
  - d. The consecratory cleansing of the Levites (Num 8:12, 21).
  - e. The purification of the priest and the altar (Ex 29:31–37; Ezek 43:20–26).
3. Blood and atonement
- a. Blood rituals

Blood carries a central significance in the Old Testament cult. God reserves the blood of animals for Himself for a special purpose. From the primeval days, God has strictly prohibited the consumption of blood. After the flood, God blessed Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply. God

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3 The Bible, particularly the Book of Numbers, records instances or scenarios where atonement is made apart from sacrificial offerings. These include the giving of atonement money or spoils of war (Ex 30:11–16; Num 31:50); Aaron's intercessory use of the incense (Num 16:46, 47); Phinehas' ending the plague (Num 25:13); and the shedding of the blood of the murderer (Num 35:33). Nevertheless, atonement in the context of the temple worship is always achieved through offerings.

4 In Ezekiel's vision, the grain offering and the peace offering, along with the sin offering and burnt offering are mentioned as part of making atonement (Ezek 45:15, 17).

promised that all living creatures will fear mankind and gave the living creatures to man as food. But a condition was attached to the permission to consume flesh—man must not eat the blood of the living creatures: “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Gen 9:4). The blood of a living creature is its life, and it is not for human consumption.

We also read the prohibition of blood in Deuteronomy (Deut 12:13–16, 23–25). God commanded the Israelites to make sacrificial offerings only in the place which the Lord chooses but granted them permission to slaughter domestic livestock for food within their gates. Even if the slaughter is not for the purpose of offering, the Israelites were not to consume the blood. Instead, they must “pour it on the earth like water.” The reason is thus stated, “Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat” (Deut 12:23). As in Gen 9:4, blood is identified as the life of the creature.

In Leviticus, the command to refrain from eating blood is given in connection with stipulations on offerings. According to Leviticus 3, the fat of the sacrificial animals is the LORD’s. It is to not to be eaten, but must be burned on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice as a sweet aroma to the LORD. Likewise, no one should eat blood (v. 17). As part of the sacrificial rituals, the priests must handle the blood according to the LORD’s instructions. Similarly, in Lev 7:22–27, the LORD also forbid the eating of any blood in the context of reserving the fat of the offering for the LORD. Thus it is apparent that blood has a significant place in offerings and this special function of blood underlies the prohibition to consume blood.

Leviticus 17:10–12 records an even more explicit reason for abstaining from blood. The warning against violating the command is severe: “And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people” (Lev

17:10). The reason follows, “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11).

Once again, we see the close connection between blood and life. Furthermore, God makes it explicit that He has given the blood of animals to His people upon the altar. The blood is to be placed on the altar, and the Lord has assigned it its special place for the benefit of His people.

The purpose of placing the blood on the altar is “to make atonement on behalf of your souls” (עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם לְכַפֵּר). Since the blood of the animal is identified with its blood, we may say that placing the blood of the animal on the altar is equivalent to placing the life of the animal on the altar, and the end result is the atonement for the lives of God’s people. Finally, the LORD explains that it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. Thus we have here an explicit statement that draws a definite link between blood and atonement.

b. Place of blood in atonement rites

We may observe in the detailed description of the procedures for offerings that the blood and the handling of the blood are central to the sacrificial rite.<sup>5</sup>

Even prior to the institution of the temple cult, God had prescribed special rites, performed on specific occasions, which involved the use of blood. Before the LORD sent the final plague on the land of Egypt, He commanded the Israelites through Moses and Aaron to observe the feast of the Passover. They were to strike the lintel and doorposts with the blood of the Passover lamb. When the LORD passed through to strike the Egyptians and saw the blood on the lintel and doorposts, He would pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to enter the house of the Israelites (Ex 12:1–28). Thus the blood of the sacrificial

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5 See Gilders’ meticulous analysis of blood manipulation in the Bible; *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible : Meaning and power* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

lamb, applied to the entrance of the house, served as a sign to protect the lives of the Israelites.

When the Israelites had journeyed to the Wilderness of Sinai, the LORD established His covenant with the Israelites by issuing His laws and decrees through Moses. In the covenantal ceremony that followed, Moses built an altar and twelve pillars. He sent young men to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. Then he took half of the blood and put it in basins and sprinkled the other half of the blood on the altar. Upon reading the Book of the Covenant to the people, the people pledged to obey all that the LORD had said. Then Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, calling the blood “the blood of the covenant” (Ex 24:1–11). The blood of the covenant had a central significance to the sacrifices and to the ceremony.

In Deuteronomy 12, we observe a distinction between the handling of blood in a non-cultic slaughter and in an offering. When slaughtering and eating meat within their gates, the Israelites were to pour the blood on the earth like water (Deut 12:15–16; 21–24). On the other hand, the blood of burnt offerings and eaten sacrifices must be offered on the altar (Deut 12:27). The emphasis on the proper handling of the blood indicates its important place in offerings.

The detailed stipulations for the various kinds of offerings recorded in Leviticus give us further insight into the significance of blood in offerings.

First, we observe that the handling of blood is assigned to the priest. Second, the prescription for the offering process always lays out how the blood is to be handled.

i. Presentation, tossing, and draining of blood

The person who brings the offering puts his hand on the head of the offering and slaughters it. But it is the priest who brings the blood to the altar. Then the priest tosses<sup>6</sup>

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6 “Sprinkle,” as in the NKJV (זָרַק) may be translated “toss,” which renders a different action than the word for “sprinkle” (זָרַק) as found in the ritual for the sin offering (e.g. Lev 4:6). See William K. Gilders, *Blood ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and power* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 25–26.

the blood all around the altar (Lev 1:5, 11; 3:1–2, 8, 12–13; 7:2; 8:19; 9:12, 18). If the offering is of birds, the procedure is somewhat different, but it is also the priest who drains out the blood at the side or base of the altar (Lev 1:14, 15). The focus on the handling of the blood, and the fact that it is the priest who presents, tosses, sprinkles, and drains the blood at the altar indicate that the blood is central to the sacrificial ritual.

ii. Sprinkling, daubing, and pouring of blood

For the sin offering the LORD specified a different mode of blood handling. If the sin has to do with the people of Israel, the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting.

*Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting. The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. (Lev 4:5–7; cf. 16–19)<sup>7</sup>*

If the sinner is a ruler or one of the common people, “the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering” (Lev 4:25, 30).<sup>8</sup> In such a scenario, the blood is not brought into the sanctuary.

At the ordination ceremony of Aaron and his sons, Moses killed the sin offering, took the blood, and daubed some on the horns of the altar. This purified the altar. Then he poured the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it, to make atonement for it (Lev 8:14–15; cf. Ex 29:12). After offering the ram of the burnt offering,

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<sup>7</sup> “Put,” (שָׁחַט) as in the NKJV, may be translated “daub.” See Gilders, 27–28.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

Moses offered the ram of consecration. He killed the ram, and took some of its blood and daubed it on the top of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. He did the same for Aaron's sons (Lev 8:22–24; cf. Ex 29:19, 20). The daubing of blood on the extremities may be understood as serving a consecratory purpose, based on the same verb that is used for daubing the blood to consecrate the altar. After the daubing of blood, Moses tossed the blood all around on the altar (Lev 8:24).<sup>9</sup> Upon the completion of the consecration offerings, Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron and his sons as well as on their garments. This sprinkling of blood consecrated Aaron, his sons, and their garments (Lev 8:30; cf. Ex 29:21).

When Aaron offered the sin offering for the first time at the inauguration of the cult, he followed the procedure of the handling of blood for a sin offering for a ruler or a commoner, as described earlier. "Then the sons of Aaron brought the blood to him. And he dipped his finger in the blood, put it on the horns of the altar, and poured the blood at the base of the altar" (Lev 9:9).

### iii. Day of Atonement

The central place of blood is particularly prominent in the prescription for the priestly duty on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1–28). The LORD requires a young bull and a goat as sin offerings and a goat as a burnt offering. Aaron is to first kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself. Having put the incense on the fire before the LORD so that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat, "He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times" (Lev 16:14). Then he shall bring the blood of the goat,

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<sup>9</sup> See a similar daubing of blood on the extremities in the case of cleansing from leprosy in Lev 14:14, 25.

which is for the assembly of Israel, inside the veil and “do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat” (v. 16). After making atonement in the Holy Place, “Aaron shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel” (vv. 18, 19).

c. Effect of blood

We have seen earlier that since the establishment of the temple cult, offerings have become the means of atonement. More specifically, however, we have also noticed that the blood of the offering, as well as the application of the blood, is central to the sacrificial rituals. A few references speak explicitly of the blood rituals as achieving atonement.

In stating the law regarding the sin offering, the LORD said to Moses, “But no sin offering from which any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of meeting, to make atonement in the holy place, shall be eaten. It shall be burned in the fire” (Lev 6:30). The conveying of blood into the tabernacle is for the purpose of making atonement.

Two specific actions involving the application of blood in the priestly ordination ceremony are said to have accomplished atonement: “... Then he took the blood, and put some on the horns of the altar all around with his finger, and purified the altar. And he poured the blood at the base of the altar, and consecrated it, to make atonement for it” (Lev 8:15). Incidentally, we may also take note of the association of blood, purification, consecration, and atonement.

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron makes atonement for himself, his household, and the assembly of Israel by sprinkling the blood of the bull and the goat on and before the mercy seat in the Holy Place (Lev 16:14–18). After making



atonement in the Holy Place, he is to go out to the altar of incense and make atonement for it by daubing some of the blood on the horns of the altar all around (v. 18; Ex 30:10). It is clear here that the sprinkling and daubing of blood achieves atonement.

In Ezekiel's vision of the temple, the LORD instructed the prophet concerning the altar on the day when it is made. He shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the four horns of the altar, on the four corners of the ledge, and on the rim around it, to "cleans it and make atonement for it" (Ezek 43:18–20). We have here yet another direct link between the blood of the offering and atonement.

Encompassed within the effect of atonement are specific aspects of atonement, including cleansing, purification, and consecration. We also find references, some of which we have seen already, where these effects are attributed to blood rituals. For example, the purification and consecration of the altar (Lev 8:15; 16:18–19; Ezek 43:18–20); the consecration of Aaron, his sons, and their garments (Lev 8:30); and the cleansing of the leprous person and house (Lev 14:14, 25, 49–52).

In Leviticus 17, the key passage on blood and atonement, we have seen that it is God who assigned blood its special significance, function, and effect. Having laid down all the laws concerning offerings and purification, the LORD commanded Moses to convey to Aaron, his sons, and all the children of Israel to take heed to the exclusive use of the blood.

Verses 3–9 stipulate that the Israelites must bring offerings to the LORD at the tabernacle of meeting and to the priest instead of sacrificing in the open field. Any slaughtering an ox or lamb or goat for an offering away from the tabernacle constitutes murder and sacrificing to demons. The consequence for the one guilty of an illegitimate shedding of blood of sacrificial animals is severance from the people.

Verses 10–12 are the prohibition against eating blood and the penalty for violation. The reason is that the LORD has given

the blood, as the life of the flesh, to his people upon the altar to make atonement for their souls. The LORD explains further, “for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (v. 11). The blood is reserved for atonement on the altar, and the power of atonement is in the blood. It is on this premise that the LORD forbids the consumption of blood or any blood ritual outside of the temple cult.

The blood of the offering, therefore, is the means of atonement by God’s design. While other aspects of an offering, such as the laying of hands on the head of the offering and the burning of the offering on the altar, as well as the entire sacrificial or purification ritual as prescribed by the law, are integral to achieving atonement, all of these revolve around the shedding of the blood of the offering. For this reason, Hebrews sums up the essential place of blood in removing guilt and uncleanness, “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb 9:22).

#### 4. God as the source of atonement

As noted before, the making of atonement is a priestly duty. The one who makes atonement stands as an intercessor or mediator between God and man. However, the Scripture also points to God as the ultimate source of atonement.

Contemplating the mighty deeds of God with the Israelites in the wilderness journey, the psalmist writes,

*But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, And did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, And did not stir up all His wrath; (Ps 78:38)*

The Hebrew word for “forgave,” (כָּפַר) is the same word as that which is translated “made atonement” elsewhere. It was the LORD God who removed the iniquity of the Israelites.

In a number of places in the Bible we also read appeals to God as the source of atonement:

*Provide atonement, O Lord, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of*

*Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. (Dt 21:8)*

*For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone" (2 Ch 30:18)*

*Iniquities prevail against me; As for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them. (Ps 65:3)*

*Help us, O God of our salvation, For the glory of Your name; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, For Your name's sake! (Ps 79:9)*

*Yet, Lord, You know all their counsel Which is against me, to slay me. Provide no atonement for their iniquity, Nor blot out their sin from Your sight; But let them be overthrown before You. Deal thus with them In the time of Your anger. (Je 18:23)*

The basis of such appeals is the trust that God will provide atonement for His people. Thus we see the assurance in Moses' song:

*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people. (Dt 32:43)*

The prophet Micah likewise prophesies that God will remove all of the sins of His people:

*He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea. (Mic 7:19)*

In fact, the appeal to God for atonement ultimately rests on the LORD's own promise. The LORD speaks to the Israelites through Ezekiel with regards to the covenant He will establish with His people,

*And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done,' says the Lord God. (Eze 16:62–63)*

A divine promise of similar nature is also found in the prophecy through Jeremiah:

*I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. (Je 33:8)*

Therefore, even with the provisions in the law for atonement by means of offerings and blood rituals, we can see a consciousness that the ultimate source and means of atonement can be none other than God. True to His promise, God will eventually atone for the sins of His people by means of becoming the offering Himself.

### C. CIRCUMCISION

#### 1. Origin

God first established circumcision when he made a covenant with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 17. The LORD appeared to Abraham and declared Himself as the Almighty God. He commanded Abraham to walk before Him and be blameless and indicated that He would make His covenant between Him and Abraham. God stated the covenant with a series of promises, namely, that nations and kings would come from Abraham, that the LORD would be God to him and his descendants, and that he and his descendants would possess all the land of Canaan (Gen 17:4–8).

As the beneficiaries of God's covenant, Abraham and his descendants shall keep the covenant. To do that, Abraham and every male child shall be circumcised. Every male child born in the household or bought with money must be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen 17:9–13). The circumcision is a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen 17:11). Not receiving circumcision is paramount to breaking God's covenant and the penalty is severance from God's people (Gen 17:14).

Although God's promises seemed impossible, Abraham submitted to God and kept the covenant he had received. On the same day God spoke to him, he took Ishmael and all the

other men in his house, whether born in his house or bought with money, and circumcised them. Abraham himself was also circumcised (Gen 17:23–24). In the fullness of time, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, just as the LORD had said. Abraham likewise circumcised Isaac in accord with the LORD’s command (Gen 21:4).

## 2. Observance and Significance

God established circumcision to be a sign of His covenant with Abraham. It is an external mark in the flesh that indicates God’s covenant. Thus the LORD said, “My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:13b). Abraham’s descendants must keep this command from generation to generation (Gen 17:9). Hence, circumcision was a prerequisite for participation in the Abrahamic covenant. It set apart God’s people from all other nations. The uncircumcised were excluded from the chosen race, being “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:11–12).

When Shechem the Hivite sought to marry Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, the sons of Jacob explained that giving their sister to one who is uncircumcised would be a reproach to them (Gen 34:14). They laid down a condition which must be met before they would consent to Shechem’s request: “If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised” (v. 15). While their words were spoken in deceit, they indicate how circumcision was viewed. It identified the descendants of Abraham as a special people, and intermarriage with the uncircumcised would be a reproach.

While Moses lived under the shelter of his father-in-law in Midian, his son was uncircumcised. On the way back to Egypt, the LORD met him and sought to kill him (Ex 4:19–26). God had commanded Moses to warn Pharaoh that He would kill his firstborn son if he refuses to let Israel, God’s firstborn, go and serve the LORD. Now, the LORD sought to kill Moses because his uncircumcised son. Having left the house of his father-in-law and being the head of the house now, Moses would have been guilty of breaking God’s covenant if he let his

son remain uncircumcised. Zipporah, Moses' wife, cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and the LORD let him go.

The Israelites kept the covenant of circumcision up until the exodus. We may infer this from God's ordinance for the Passover:

*And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it... All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it." (Ex 12:43-48)*

The uncircumcised was forbidden to take part in the Passover. Any stranger or hired servant must first receive circumcision and let all his males be circumcised before he may participate in the Passover. Thus, circumcision separated the community of God's people from outsiders.

In the law of purification, God formally laid down the stipulation to circumcise a male child on the eighth day of his birth (Lev 12:1-3). However, those Israelites who were born on the wilderness journey did not receive circumcision (Josh 5:5-7). Therefore, after crossing the Jordan, Joshua commanded that all the sons of Israel be circumcised again the second time (vv. 2-3). The place where the circumcision was performed was called Gilgal because the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you" (v. 9). After the circumcision, the children of Israel also kept the Passover (v. 10).

Because of its vital place in God's covenant with His people, circumcision had become the mark of the chosen race. The uncircumcised were excluded from God's people and from participation in the divine covenant. Among the Israelites, the term, "uncircumcised," was often used in a derogatory way to designate the foreign nations (Jdg 14:3; 15:18; 1Sam 14:6; 17:26,

36; 31:4; 2Sam 1:20; Ezek 28:10; 31:18; 32:19, 21, 24–30, 32; 44:7, 9). In Isaiah 52:1, the uncircumcised are mentioned together with the unclean. We have also observed how being uncircumcised was viewed by God and by His people as a reproach.

The sign of circumcision is in fact closely related to faith.

When writing about Abraham, Paul stated,

*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. (Rom 4:11, 12)*

Abraham believed in the LORD when He promised Abraham an heir from his body and numerous descendants. Therefore the LORD accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen 15:4–6). According to Paul, the circumcision Abraham received was a seal of the righteousness of faith God had imputed to him. By keeping this mark in the flesh, Abraham and his descendants expressed that they were a people of faith in God’s covenant.

### 3. Circumcision as a metaphor

The Scripture often uses the term “circumcision” figuratively to refer to something other than the sign in the flesh that Abraham had received. When used as a metaphor, to circumcise connotes removal of something undesirable.

When the LORD sent Moses to appear before Pharaoh, Moses replied that he was “of uncircumcised lips” (Ex 6:12), meaning that he was slow of speech and of tongue (cf. Ex 4:10). One of the laws God gave to the Israelites concerned the holiness of newly planted fruit trees in the Promised Land: “When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten” (Lev 19:23).

The metaphor of circumcision is also used to indicate a person’s attitude toward God. An uncircumcised ear is one

that turns away from the word of the LORD (Jer 6:10). An uncircumcised heart is a heart of rebellion towards God (cf. Lev 26:41; Jer 9:26; Ezek 44:7, 9). Moses appealed to the congregation of Israel to love the LORD and keep His commandments, saying, “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut 10:16). The LORD likewise called His people to repentance: “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings” (Jer 4:4). It is this inward circumcision of the heart that Paul especially refers to when discussing the essence of circumcision (Rom 2:25–29; Php 3:3).

Just as the LORD promised to cleanse and make atonement for His people, He would also circumcise them. When Moses declared the words of the covenant to the people, he warned them of the curse that would befall them if they turn their hearts away from the LORD. But after the pronouncement of the curse, he assured them that the LORD would bring them back from their captivity when they return to the LORD and obey His voice. Furthermore, Moses prophesied, “...the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). This promise already looks beyond the external sign at the inward seal of righteousness that can only come from God. In the new era of redemption, God will accomplish this spiritual circumcision, effecting righteousness and holiness in His people.



# Chapter 2

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

Among the first things we encounter when reading the gospels are the appearance and works of John the Baptist. John came to be known as “the Baptist” because baptism characterized his ministry. Therefore, baptism already figured prominently at the dawn of the New Testament era. But what were the significance and purpose of this baptism? For us to fully appreciate the importance and meaning of John’s baptism, it is necessary to see it in light of who John was and what he had been called to do. By examining the person John, his ministry, and the message of his preaching, we will gain insight into the nature of the baptism he preached and administered.

### A. THE BIRTH AND MISSION OF JOHN

John was born in a priestly family. Zacharias the priest and his wife Elizabeth “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Lk 1:6). John’s birth was a miracle. Elizabeth was barren, and both she and her husband were well advanced in years (Lk 1:7). The angel Gabriel appeared to Zecharias while he was serving as priest before God in the temple and announced the coming of a son.

The name John was given by divine ordinance. The identity and life of John were likewise predetermined by God and foretold by the angel. The angel said to Zacharias,

*And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of the*

*fathers to the children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Lk 1:14–17)*

John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even in conception—an indication of God’s call to accomplish His purpose. While still in his mother’s womb, he leaped with joy at hearing the greeting of Mary, who had also been revealed of the birth of Christ. This extraordinary response from an unborn child exemplifies the work of the Spirit in this chosen vessel. According to word of the Lord through Gabriel, John would be great in the sight of the Lord. His birth would be a joyful occasion for his father and many others. The reason for joy lies in the mission for which he was born. Therefore, from the very beginning of his life, John had been uniquely set apart by God.

According to the prophecy of Zacharias his father, spoken under the guidance of the Spirit, John would be “the prophet of the Highest” (Lk 1:76). The endowment of the Holy Spirit upon him attested to this appointment. As the Lord’s prophet, he must first receive the word of the Lord. Hence, Luke tells us that when John began his ministry, “The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness” (Lk 3:2).

God’s mission for John was to “Turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God”, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 1:16–17). This would be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi:

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.  
And he will turn  
The hearts of the fathers to the children,  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,  
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. (Mal 4:5–6)*

John, as the eschatological prophet, was sent to arouse a wakening of hearts. By bringing back the wayward hearts of the people back to God, he would restore a unity in the household founded upon obedience to God.

Such a ponderous mission called for a stringent lifestyle that would prepare the prophet for the work he had been sent to do.

Like the priest on duty or a Nazirite who had consecrated himself to the Lord, John was to abstain from wine or strong drink (Lk 1:15; cf. Lev 10:9; Num 6:2–4). The years of preparation for his ministry were spent in the deserts, as Luke noted, “So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Lk 1:80). Through such training and consecration, he was endued with the spirit and power of Elijah to embark on his mission.

His clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt and his diet of locusts and wild honey reflected his life in the wilderness and remind us of the prophet Elijah (Mt 3:4; Mk 1:6; cf. 2Kgs 1:8). He and his disciples also devoted themselves to frequent fasting and prayer (Mt 9:14; 11:18; Mk 2:18; Lk 5:33; 7:33). The Lord Jesus contrasted the prophet in the wilderness with those wearing soft garments and living in kings’ houses. From this and other descriptions of John we may infer a life of extreme simplicity and harshness—one that was consistent with his mission.

## **B. JOHN’S MINISTRY**

True to his calling, John the Baptist rose up as the prophet who would lead the people back to God. He began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea (Mt 3:1; cf. Mk 1:4). This was where he had spent a considerable amount of time and where the word of the Lord first came to him (Lk 1:80; 3:2). He went into “all the region around Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Lk 3:3).

The impact of John’s baptizing ministry was extensive. Matthew records that “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan” went out to John to be baptized (Mt 3:5; cf. Mk 1:5; Jn 10:40–42). His mighty works aroused such awakening that the people were in expectation and reasoned in their hearts whether he was the Christ (Lk 3:15; Jn 1:19). His influence even reached Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, who eventually imprisoned and killed him (Mt 14:3–11; Mk 6:17–29; Lk 3:19–20).

Luke introduces John the Baptist in a manner that recalls God's calling of the Old Testament prophets, setting the ministry of John in a historical context:

*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. (Lk 3:1–2)*

Matthew uses the words, “in those days” to link the beginning of John's ministry to the previous infancy narrative of Christ. The implication was that his appearance and work were according to a divinely appointed time. The Gospel of Mark is even more explicit. Mark opens the book with this note, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” and immediately brings John the Baptist unto the stage (Mk 1:1–8). The placement of John's ministry at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals that it ushered in the new era of the kingdom of God. Acts 1:21–22 confirms that the ministry of John marked the opening of the Christian age, because the selection criteria for the new apostle who would replace Judas was that he had accompanied the other apostles “beginning from the baptism of John” to the day of the Lord's ascension.

From the timing of John's ministry, his calling, and his extraordinary birth, we can understand at least two things. First, John was not a self-appointed prophet. Instead, God raised him up as the prophet who would turn the hearts of His people toward God. He had sent him to preach and to baptize for this purpose. Second, the ministry of John the Baptist was to prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was to lead the people to put their faith in Jesus, who came after him.

The Gospel of John clearly states both of the above points:

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. (Jn 1:6–9)*

An examination of the various portrayals of John the Baptist helps us to understand his role in the larger scheme. All four gospels present John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Mt 3:3; Mk 1:2–3; Lk 3:4–6; Jn 1:23):

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
“Prepare the way of the Lord;  
Make straight in the desert  
A highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be exalted  
And every mountain and hill brought low;  
The crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough places smooth;  
The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see it together;  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Is 40:3–5)*

Mark also connects the words of Isaiah with Malachi’s prophecy, “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me” (Mal 3:1). John the Baptist was the messenger whom God had sent to prepare the way of the Lord. He came to bring low every mountain and hill, straighten every crooked place, and make smooth every rough place in the hearts of the people. This pioneering work was in preparation for the salvation of God that was about to be revealed to all flesh (cf. Lk 3:6).

Although John denied being the Elijah or the Prophet whom the Jews had been waiting for (Jn 1:19–22), the Lord Jesus confirmed that John the Baptist was indeed the Elijah prophesied in the Scriptures (Mt 11:14; 17:10–13; Mk 9:11–13). According to Jesus, John was actually more than a prophet (Mt 11:9; Lk 7:26) because he had been sent to accomplish an unprecedented and unique mission. The Lord said,

*Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. (Mt 11:11–13; cf. Lk 16:16)*

No one born of a woman was greater than John in the sense that no other prophet before him was commissioned to usher in the

greatest era in redemption history. He marked the transition from the period of the prophets and the law to the era of the kingdom of heaven that was inaugurated and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The role he had been assigned was instrumental in this transitional stage, for he was called to bring about a total transformation in the hearts and lives of the people of God in preparation for the coming of the Savior.

The work of John the Baptist consisted mainly of preaching and baptism, and the two are intimately linked. He preached a baptism of repentance, and those who came to be baptized must heed the message of his preaching.

#### 1. John's preaching

John was a witness for the truth (Jn 5:33). His preaching, admonitions, and exhortations turned the hearts of many to the Lord and paved the way for the coming of Christ.

He proclaimed the same message that Jesus and His disciples would later preach: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Mt 3:1, 2; cf. Mt 4:17; 10:7). The call to repentance was also a call to baptism, an aspect we will discuss in more detail.

John addressed the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, including the Pharisees and Sadducees, as "brood of vipers" (Mt 3:7; Lk 3:7). His unreserved words laid bare the sinfulness of the people, but also brought the hope of escape from the wrath to come.

Repentance is not merely a sense of contrition for past transgressions, but also entails a conversion of the heart toward God, resulting in a change of the person's life (see commentary on Matthew 3). Therefore, John the Baptist emphasized a concrete renewal of behavior that reflects the change of heart.

He commanded the people to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Mt 3:8; Lk 3:8). They must not take confidence in the fact that they were the children of Abraham and presume to be indispensable members of God's election, for God is able to raise up children to Abraham from the stones. The judgment on the unrepentant is imminent. Continuing the analogy of fruit trees, John warned them, "And even now the ax is laid to

the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 3:10; Lk 3:9). God’s judgment is not in the distant future but is an immediate reality. Leading a godly life in keeping with a changed attitude is the only way to escape God’s wrath.

John helped the people apply the call to repentance to their everyday lives. When the people asked him, “What shall we do then?” he answered, “He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise” (Lk 3:11). To the tax collectors who came to be baptized and wanted to know what to do, John said, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you” (Lk 3:12, 13). To the soldiers he said, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages” (Lk 3:14). Through these practical instructions, John directed the people back to the ethical requirements of God’s law as the way to bear fruit worthy of repentance.

The second aspect of John’s preaching had to do with the coming of the Christ. The urgent call to repentance was founded on this anticipation. As powerful as John’s ministry was, John did not for a moment divert from the goal of his mission—to prepare the way of the Lord. While all the people reasoned in their hearts whether John was the Christ, John was unequivocal about it. “He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’” (Jn 1:20). Being a witness to the Light, John proclaimed to the people:

*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Mt 3:11, 12; cf Mk 1:7, 8; Lk 3:16, 17; Jn 1:15, 26, 27)*

John clearly established the status of Christ. Even though He was coming after John, Jesus was mightier and greater than John. John deemed himself unfit to even offer Christ such menial service as carrying His sandals.

Whereas John baptized with water unto repentance, Christ would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and fire. The Lord Himself would pour out the Holy Spirit unto His people (Acts 1:4–8; 2:32, 33; cf. 11:15–16). This would be the fulfillment of the eschatological promise as recorded in the Scriptures (cf. Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:26, 27; 37:14; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:16–21). With the Spirit of burning the Lord would purify His people (cf. Isa 4:2–5; 2Thess 2:13; Tit 3:4–7). But those who do not bear good fruit worthy of repentance would be consumed with the fire of judgment (Mt 3:10, 12).

John depicted Christ as a farmer cleaning out His threshing floor. Just as the farmer separates the wheat from the chaff, the Lord would separate the righteous from the wicked. He would gather the righteous into His kingdom but cast out the wicked into eternal condemnation. Although John's warning was stern, his message was not merely one of doom, but also one of hope. The Messiah, who was soon coming, would bring with him the gift of the Holy Spirit to purify His people. Turning back to God and leading fruitful lives through faith in the Savior means escape from God's wrath and salvation into the heavenly kingdom.

When Jesus came and was ready to embark on his ministry, John's role as His witness was instrumental. The most significant event recorded in the Gospels that serves as the opening of Jesus' public ministry was His baptism by John. We shall study this important moment in greater depth, but suffice it to say for now that John the Baptist served a crucial part in this event in introducing Christ to the masses.

In the Fourth Gospel we read that "John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me'" (Jn 1:29, 30). Then John the Baptist continued to bear witness that the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus testified that He was the Son of God. In this proclamation John announced to the world that Jesus was the "Mightier One" he had been preaching about. He also brought out both the divinity of



Jesus and His atoning sacrifice for mankind. On the following day John looked at Jesus as He walked and said to the two disciples who were with him, “Behold the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard John’s testimony and followed Jesus (Jn 1:35–37).

John’s devotion to his mission as the witness for Christ was wholehearted. When Jesus’ baptizing ministry was gaining greater popularity, John’s disciples came and reported that everyone was going over to Jesus. But John cheerfully acknowledged his lesser status. He compared himself to the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice (Jn 3:25–29). Thus he recognized and upheld God’s will in giving Jesus increasing prominence as well as his own receding role. His faithfulness, humility, and pure adoration for Christ all contributed to his testimony for the Lord.

During his ministry Jesus once went over beyond the Jordan and stayed at the place where John baptized initially. Many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.” The presence of Jesus among the people of the region reminded them of the testimony of John about Jesus. Jesus was indeed the Son of God as proclaimed by John the Baptist. Consequently, many believed in Jesus there (Jn 10:40–42). John’s voice continued to speak for Christ even after his time had passed. Although he was no miracle-worker, his truthful and powerful preaching about repentance and about the Lord Jesus truly paved the way for Christ.

## 2. John’s baptism

The area in which John began preaching was the wilderness of Judea and all the region around the Jordan (Mt 3:1; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:2, 3), and he baptized those who came out to him in the Jordan River (Mt 3:5, 6, 13; Mk 1:5, 9). The Fourth Gospel records that John first baptized in Bethabara beyond the Jordan (Jn 1:28; 10:40). Later, he also baptized in Aenon near Salim (Jn 3:23).

John was known as “the Baptist” (ὁ βαπτιστής or ὁ βαπτίζων). This indicates that baptism was the chief feature of his activities. The fact that the description was used only of John distinguishes the baptisms he performed from other ministrations. Jn 3:25 records a dispute that arose between the disciples of John and the Jews about purification. We have no information on the nature of the dispute, but we may observe that while John’s baptism was in some ways associated with purification, the reason for the dispute was probably due to the distinction between John’s baptism and the purification rites in the law. On the one hand, religious washing was not a foreign concept to the Jews, especially in view of the purification rites and proselyte baptism. On the other hand, John’s baptism certainly introduced something that was new.

When the delegates of priests and Levites from Jerusalem came to inquire about John’s identity, John confessed that he was not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet. Then they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (Jn 1:25). We may infer here that in the Jewish expectation, the Messiah or the prophet God sends before the last day would baptize the people. Such an expectation might be rooted in the promised eschatological washing offered in the prophetic writings such as Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1. It also explains why John’s baptizing activities made the people reason in their hearts whether he was the Christ. The amount of attention John’s baptism gathered also shows that his baptism was unlike any other religious washings of his day.

Unlike purification rituals, in which a person washes himself, the baptism of John was administered by the Baptist. The people were “baptized by” John (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5; Lk 3:7). The passive verb, “baptized” (ἐβαπτίσθη) and the preposition “by” (ὕπὸ with the genitive) indicate that John did not just witness the baptism but actually administered it. The person who comes to baptism is the recipient, not the administrator, of the washing. Receiving baptism is a gesture of submission to God’s will. When Jesus came to be baptized by John, John deterred Him and said, “I need to be baptized by You, and are

You coming to me?” In John’s mind, to be baptized means to submit to one of greater authority who has been sent by God. Thus John’s baptism called for submission to the work of God on the part of the one being baptized.

John’s baptism also differed from Jewish proselyte baptism, if proselyte baptism was already practiced at this time, in that it was preached to all the people, not just converts to Judaism.<sup>10</sup> Those who came to be baptized were the children of Abraham by descent (cf. Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8). The entire nation of Israel was called to turn to God, confess their sins, and bear fruit worthy of repentance in view of the coming of the Savior and impending judgment. This total, once-for-all, transformation and the baptism that brought the people into a renewed relationship with God was a central characteristic of John’s baptism, which set it apart from proselyte baptism.

The message of John’s preaching was not only about the need for repentance, but also the need for baptism. He preached “a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). John’s baptism and repentance were integrally related. Those who responded to his call of repentance came out to him to be baptized in the Jordan.

What was the relationship between baptism and repentance? Was the baptism of John purely an expression of one’s repentance, or did it also have a spiritual effect? It is clear that repentance was required of those who came to be baptized, for the people confessed their sins as they received baptism (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:4). However, John’s baptism was more than an outward expression of repentance.

It is important to bear in mind the source of John’s baptism. When the chief priests and elders asked Jesus what the source of His authority was, Jesus said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?” (Mt 21:24, 25). The purpose

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<sup>10</sup> Whether proselyte baptism was practiced at the time of John is not certain. See Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 64–69.

of Jesus' question was to confound the scheme of those who confronted him, but the point is clear. John's baptism was from heaven just as Jesus' authority was from heaven. John, being the prophet of the Highest and God's messenger, baptized the people as his divine commission. His baptism came from heaven, and he was sent by God to baptize. Bearing witness about Christ, he said, "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 1:33). God the Father was the one who commissioned John to baptize. Therefore, his baptism was not a mere human expression of repentance. It involved the sending and working of God. Submitting to the baptism of John was submitting to God and His will (Lk 7:28-30).

In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist stated that he baptized the people with water "unto repentance" (εις μετάνοιαν). The preposition "unto" (εις) connotes purpose or result. Not only is repentance the prerequisite, it is also the outcome of baptism. By receiving the baptism of repentance, the sinner enters into a converted life.

Furthermore, both Mark and Luke record that John preached "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). Once again, the preposition "for" (εις) indicates purpose or outcome. The baptism of repentance John preached was for the purpose of the remission of sins. Baptism accompanied by repentance results in the remission of sins. If only repentance was necessary for the remission of sins, and baptism was only an expression of repentance, then the term "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" would be problematic because it includes baptism in the process of attaining the remission of sins.

Which, then, is effective for the remission of sins? Baptism, repentance, or both? The answer is neither without the atoning sacrifice of Christ. If John's baptism of repentance was sufficient in itself for the remission of sins, then it would have rendered the work of Christ unnecessary. However, we have seen that the ultimate mission of John the Baptist was to

witness for the Lord Jesus and lead the people to Him. The remission of sins is to be received through faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:43). To this end John preached repentance and administered baptism. Thus we may say that the effect of remission of sins through the baptism of John was a promised effect, which was made possible with the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Historically, the sacrifice of Jesus had not yet occurred at the time of John. But in the eternal perspective, the Lamb had already been slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). Thus, the effect of remission of sins in the baptism of John was based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ—an event that was future from a historical perspective but was beyond time in God’s eternal perspective. Before the coming of Christ, those who repented and were baptized by John did receive the promise of the forgiveness of sin. After Christ had come, this promise would be fulfilled through faith in the Lord Jesus.

The effect of remission of sins in John’s baptism is analogous to the effect of sacrifices in the Old Testament. God established and commanded the offerings through which the sins of the people may be atoned for. However, without the coming of Christ the ultimate offering, the offerings themselves had no effect. They were but a reminder of sins (Heb 10:1–4). Nevertheless, the LORD Himself promised the atonement of sins through the offerings. The effect of the offerings was a promised effect, to be received in faith first and realized eventually at the coming of Christ in the flesh. For this reason, Hebrews tells us that the men and women of faith in the Old Testament, “having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” (Heb 11:39, 40). The saints who lived before the time of Christ are made perfect with believers who lived after the coming of Christ. They are all made perfect by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, who fulfilled what was promised to them in the Old Testament.

The baptism of John, although preached and practiced in preparation for the coming of Christ, belonged to the Old Testament. Christ was sent forth by God to be born under the law to redeem those who were under the law (Gal 4:4, 5). In other words, Christ was the One who brought His people from the Old Testament into the New. As such, the effect of the baptism of John, like that of the Old Testament offerings, was a promised effect. The promise is good and necessary before the coming of what is promised. After the reality comes, the promise must give way to the reality. Those who came to John were baptized through faith in the coming Lamb of God. After Christ had died, risen from the dead, and poured out the Holy Spirit, they needed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. If, however, anyone who had been baptized by John passed on before they had the opportunity to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, they would have been like those who died in faith in the Old Testament. Through faith they had obtained a good testimony, and would be made perfect with the New Testament saints. In time, the baptism in the New Testament superseded the baptism of John because of the saving grace Christ accomplished on the cross. From this point forward, baptism must be administered and received in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and even those who had once been baptized by John needed now to be baptized into Christ.

With this in mind, we may examine the accounts of Apollos and the disciples Paul met at Ephesus.<sup>11</sup> Apollos, an eloquent man mighty in the Scriptures, had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was fervent in spirit, but he knew only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24, 25). Although the text is not explicit, “the way of the Lord” and “the things of the Lord,” imply that he was already a believer of the Lord Jesus. But the one thing that he lacked was that he knew only the baptism of John. Therefore, Aquila and Priscilla felt it necessary to explain to him the way of God more accurately. We can infer from the passage that he still needed to be educated about the

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11 See commentary on Acts 18:24–19:7

significance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which had been made possible by the resurrection of Christ, and of baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. The work of salvation that the Lord Jesus had accomplished called for a fuller understanding of the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of only the baptism of John would have been insufficient in the Christian mission.

The disciples at Ephesus had not received or heard of the Holy Spirit. When Paul learned that they had been baptized into John's baptism, he explained to them, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." The disciples, upon hearing Paul's words, were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-7).<sup>12</sup> The final goal of John's baptism of repentance was to lead the people to put their faith in Christ. After Christ had accomplished His saving works on the cross, been exalted, and poured out the Promised Holy Spirit, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and baptism in His name became necessary for the remission of sins and receiving the Holy Spirit. The baptism of John was no longer adequate in light of the resurrected Christ. The effect of John's baptism laid not in itself but in the Mightier One who came after him, the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John the Baptist stated clearly the purpose of his baptism:

*... Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me." I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water (Jn 1:29-31)*

John was sent to baptize in order that the Lamb of God should be revealed to Israel. His baptism would have been meaningless without the revelation of the Christ and His atoning blood.

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12 See commentary on Acts 19:1-7

John the Baptist made it explicit to the people the transitory nature of his baptism: “I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8; cf. Mt 3:11, 12; Lk 3:16, 17). After His resurrection, the Lord reminded the disciples of this truth as He promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit, “For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). A few days later, on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord poured out the Holy Spirit just as He had promised. Starting from this point, remission of sin would be received through baptism in the name of the exalted Lord Jesus, and the gift of the promised Holy Spirit would be poured out on all who are baptized into this name (Acts 2:38). The Lord’s words about John’s baptism versus the baptism of the Holy Spirit once again echoed in Peter’s mind when he saw the Holy Spirit falling upon Cornelius and those who were with him (Acts 11:15, 16). The transition from the baptism of John to the baptism of the Holy Spirit had already occurred. Believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, must be baptized by the Holy Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. The marvelous baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles compelled Peter to immediately baptize these new believers in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:46–48). Therefore, in Christ Jesus the offer of the remission of sins through John’s baptism of repentance had been fulfilled. Everyone who repented of their sins at the preaching of John and was baptized with water must now come to the Lord Jesus to believe on Him, be baptized in His name for the remission of sins, and receive His promised Holy Spirit.



# Chapter 3

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Immediately before the Lord Jesus appeared to the public to preach the gospel of the kingdom, He first came to John to be baptized in the Jordan River (Mt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22; cf Jn 1:29–34).<sup>13</sup> In the midst of John’s proclamation about the coming of the Mightier One, the Messiah came and submitted to the baptism of His forerunner. This event is remarkable in many respects, as it was significant for the Lord Jesus Himself as well as for all believers. Jesus’ action was surprising to John the Baptist. How could the Messiah be baptized by a messenger who was much lesser than Him? Readers of the Gospels may likewise ask why Jesus needed to be baptized with a baptism of repentance. But the fact that Jesus indeed received baptism and the revelation that ensued behoove us to study this matter and understand its important meaning.

### A. FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

A close study of the Gospel narratives reveals that Jesus was baptized to accomplish a divine purpose. Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan (Mt 3:13; Mk 1:9). According to Matthew, He came to John at the Jordan “to be baptized by him.” In other words, His purpose for traveling this great distance was to receive the baptism of John. Whereas the multitudes that came out to John to be baptized were from Judea and Jerusalem, Jesus came down from the north to be baptized. Hence, Jesus was baptized not because He happened to be in the vicinity, but because He deemed His baptism a necessary and important mission.

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<sup>13</sup> See also the commentaries on these passages.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John tried to prevent Him (Mt 3:14). According to John 1:33, John the Baptist witnessed that he did not know Jesus at first, but He who sent him to baptize with water revealed to him and told him that upon whom he saw the Spirit descending and remained was the one baptizing with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:32–34). The words “did not know” do not mean complete ignorance of Jesus. Rather, they indicate that John did not possess full knowledge of Jesus’ identity initially. We do not know exactly how much John knew about Jesus when He came to be baptized. However, he must have recognized Jesus and knew at least to the extent that Jesus was greater than him. Therefore, he believed it was inappropriate for him to baptize Jesus. The one who baptizes assumes greater authority because he is sent by God to baptize. To John, Jesus had a higher authority and should be the One baptizing him.

Jesus answered John, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15). Without denying the reason for John’s hesitation, Jesus asked John to allow for the moment what would have been otherwise inappropriate. Jesus reminded John that it was fitting for both of them to fulfill all righteousness. This means that Jesus as well as John must conform to God’s will in every way. John’s baptism was done “in the way of righteousness” (Mt 21:32) in that he had been sent by God to carry out God’s purpose. By submitting to John’s baptism, Jesus was also treading on the way of righteousness and obeying God’s righteous requirement. In the same manner, Jesus would dedicate His whole life in carrying out the entire righteous will of God. Thus Jesus invited John to join him in fulfilling all righteousness. As such, John consented.

## **B. REVEALED TO ISRAEL**

It was God’s will for Jesus to be baptized. But what was the purpose of God’s will in Jesus’ baptism? The key is found in the words of John the Baptist himself.

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,  
“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the  
world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is*

*preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (Jn 1:29–34)*

John stated that the purpose he had been sent to baptize with water was that Jesus should be revealed to Israel. John's baptism of repentance and proclamation about the Mightier One were all in preparation for the coming of Jesus. All these led up to the crowning moment—the arrival of Jesus. And in His sovereign will God chose to reveal Jesus to Israel by first sending Him to be baptized by John.

First of all, the revelation of Jesus to Israel was in connection with John the Baptist. Jesus did not begin his ministry in complete independence of His forerunner. The Gospel writers' juxtaposition of John's arrival and Jesus' arrival using the same language ("John the Baptist came" and "Jesus came" in Mt 3:1, 13) hints at the close relationship between these two figures.

The timing of Jesus' arrival also underscores His connection with the Baptist. Mark notes, "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came ... and was baptized by John in the Jordan" (Mk 1:9). Just when John was preaching and baptizing in accord with God's purpose, Jesus arrived on the scene to be baptized.

Luke records, "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized" (Lk 3:21). Although John continued to baptize even after Jesus' baptism (cf. Jn 3:22, 23), in Luke's perspective it was as if Jesus was the last of all the people to be baptized. Hence, from the various accounts of the Gospel writers we see that Jesus' baptism was the climax of John's preaching and baptism. The point is clear. When Jesus came to be baptized, it was a proclamation to all that He was the Mightier One that John had been preaching about and the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

All four Gospels describe the unique event that accompanied Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:16, 17; Mk 1:10, 11; Lk 3:21, 22; Jn 1:32–34). When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water. While Jesus was praying, the heavens opened. The Holy Spirit of God descended bodily like a dove upon Him and remained on Him. Suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”<sup>14</sup>

In the Bible, the opening of the heavens is a sign of divine action. It either signals a special revelation from God or symbolizes the bestowment of God's favor.<sup>15</sup> The opening of the heavens after Jesus' baptism likewise indicates a special moment of revelation as well as divine approval.

The Holy Spirit, i.e. the Spirit of God, descended in a visible form upon Jesus. Either the form or the motion resembled that of a dove. According to John, the Holy Spirit also remained on Jesus (Jn 1:33). In the prophecies about God's chosen Servant and King, the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). They were now fulfilled in Jesus. At this moment, God anointed Jesus and sent Him into the ministry. In the subsequent narratives in Luke, we observe mentions of Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1) or returning to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14). Referring to Himself, Jesus turned to the prophecy in Isaiah, where it stated that the Spirit of the LORD is upon God's anointed (Lk 4:18, 19). John the Baptist bore witness that the descent and abiding of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus was the sign he had been given by God that Jesus was the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Having seen this sign take place upon Jesus, John testified that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn 1:32–34).

The voice from heaven, which is God's voice in prophetic visions,<sup>16</sup> confirmed John's testimony and declared to all who Jesus was. Jesus is God's beloved Son<sup>17</sup> in whom God is well pleased.

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14 In Matthew's account the voice from heaven spoke in the third person, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

15 Cf. Deut 28:12; Ps 78:23–25; Ezek 1:1; Isa 64:1; Mal 3:10; Jn 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 19:11.

16 Cf. Ezek 1:25, 28; Rev 4:1; 10:4, 8; 11:12; 14:13.

17 “Beloved” (ἀγαπητός) can also be understood as “only,” since in the LXX it translates the Hebrew word for “your only child” (יָחִיד) in reference to Isaac (Gen 22:2).

This pronouncement from heaven is the climax of the narrative and clearly established Jesus' divine nature. The designation of God's beloved Son may be found in the coronation hymn in Psalm 2 and in the prophecy about the suffering servant in Isaiah 42:1,<sup>18</sup> alluding to Jesus' roles as both the powerful King as well as the humble Servant. Furthermore, since Jesus is the Son of God, all the people must hear and obey Him (cf. Lk 9:35; 20:13).

Therefore, God's purpose in Jesus' baptism was to reveal Jesus' identity to Israel and to inaugurate Jesus to public ministry. Having been anointed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:38), Jesus would from this point forward fulfill His role as the Messiah through His ministry and His final sacrifice.

Why must God's revelation of Jesus' identity and His inaugurating Jesus for ministry take place in Jesus' baptism? There can be no doubt that God willed for Jesus to submit to John's baptism of repentance.

Luke's account that Jesus also was baptized when all the people were baptized (Lk 3:21) places Jesus side by side with all the sinners who came to be baptized by John. Although He was without sin, He stood alongside all those who needed the forgiveness of sins. In the same context in which John witnessed that Jesus was the Son of God, he also declared that He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29–31). It should not be surprising that the One who would mediate on behalf of the people and bear their iniquities had to first identify with them. This was in perfect accord with the Scriptures' portrayal of the Messiah. Furthermore, Jesus' baptism teaches believers the necessity of baptism. If even Jesus submitted to baptism according to the Heavenly Father's will, and He did so to stand alongside us, can we dismiss baptism as unnecessary?

While Jesus' baptism expressed His solidarity with sinners, it nevertheless also set Him apart from them. His baptism was unlike any other. It was the climax of John's baptizing ministry. Whereas the sinners confessed their sins and were baptized for

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<sup>18</sup> When quoting Isaiah 42, Matthew uses the word "the beloved one" (ὁ ἀγαπητός) to translate "My Elect One," בְּחֵירוֹי (Mt 12:18).

the remission of sins, Jesus was baptized to fulfill God's purpose and to be made known to Israel. Only Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and declaration from heaven. Through Jesus' act of humble submission, God revealed His Son and Lamb to all.

# Chapter 4

## JESUS' ADMINISTRATION OF BAPTISM

The Gospel of John records that Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea. He remained with them and baptized there (Jn 3:22–4:3). See the commentary on this passage for a detailed discussion. The Gospel writer at first records that Jesus baptized. But He clarifies later that Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples. Taking both into account, we may conclude that the disciples were baptizing with Jesus' authorization and supervision.

While this was taking place, John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salem. Based on the report of John's disciple, we understand that Jesus' baptism was drawing great multitudes. Commenting on this phenomenon, John compared Jesus and himself to the bridegroom and the friend of the bridegroom. He rejoiced exceedingly at the increasing greatness of Jesus and testified again that He is the Son of God.

Several questions concerning baptism arise out of this account. First, why did Jesus baptize, and what was the nature of His baptism? Second, why did John continue to baptize when the Mightier One had already come? The passage itself does not offer any direct answer to these questions. But we may consider the baptism Jesus was administering by looking at it in the context of His earthly ministry.

When Jesus began to preach, He proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17; cf. Mk 1:15). This was the same message that John preached (Mt 3:1–2). Hence, in the initial stage, Jesus' preaching paralleled that of John. The advancing of the kingdom of heaven called for a total transformation of heart and conduct. Those who responded to John's message came out to him to be

baptized, confessing their sins. That is why John's baptism was known as a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. It demanded repentance while offering the promise of remission of sins, which was to be fulfilled through Christ's work of redemption. Although the Gospels do not record whether Jesus or His disciples continued to baptize throughout His ministry, we know, based on the Fourth Gospel, that He did baptize at the beginning of his ministry while He was in Judea. Since the initial proclamation of Jesus also laid stress on repentance, the baptism He administered at this time should also be a baptism of repentance.

This baptism is to be distinguished from the baptism that the church was to administer later after Jesus' ascension. In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples and baptize on the basis of the universal authority He had been given (Mt 28:18, 19). Unlike the baptism Jesus and His disciples performed in Judea, where the people came out to one place to receive baptism, the baptism commanded by the risen Christ was to be preached and practiced by the disciples as they go out into all the nations. The disciples waited in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit was poured out, and thereafter began to witness for the Lord. They baptized believers in the name of the Lord Jesus with the authority endowed by the Spirit to forgive or retain sins (cf. Jn 20:21–23). This is the baptism in the church age, and it effects the remission of sins through the all-powerful name of the risen Christ and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, believers were added to the church. In view of the new age founded by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we can see that the baptism Jesus performed in His earthly ministry was a baptism of repentance like that preached by John the Baptist. It may be considered a transition from John's baptism to the New Testament baptism. Baptism into the name and body of Christ, which must be preached to all nations, would come only after Jesus' exaltation and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding the nature of Jesus' baptism at this point helps explain why John continued to baptize. Since the baptism Jesus performed focused on repentance, it did not replace the baptism of John. Their common aim was calling the people to repentance in preparation of



the coming of the kingdom of heaven. The purpose for which John had been sent had not yet ceased, and his preaching and baptism actually supported the work of Jesus. His public ministry came to a close only with his arrest and imprisonment.

John the Baptist used the analogy of the friend of the bridegroom to expound on his relationship with Jesus. The friend of the bridegroom, “who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice” (Jn 3:29). In the same way, John stood by Jesus to baptize the people and to lead them to Him. In the process, Jesus’ works outgrew John’s. John’s disciples came and told him that all were coming to Jesus. If we recall how Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan had gone out to John (Mt 3:5), we can all the more appreciate the vast extent of Jesus’ baptism. As the friend of the bridegroom, John fully endorsed the development of Jesus’ ministry, saying, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). Jesus, who comes from above, is the Son of God. He is above all and testifies what He has seen and heard (Jn 3:31–35). In Him is everlasting life. It is Him whom the people must turn their attention to. Thus it was only right that John’s works, while continuing for a time, gradually receded to the background.

Even though the baptism Jesus and His disciples administered during His earthly ministry is not often discussed at great length, perhaps because it is recorded only once, we should not overlook its significance. Baptism with water was not abolished or replaced when Jesus came. Rather, He expanded on John’s baptizing ministry. Baptism must have become so widespread, at least in Judea and around the Jordan that few would have not known baptism. It is also in this context that we may understand that baptism was in view when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being born of “water and Spirit”—a discourse which was recorded right before the account of Jesus’ administration of baptism.

The baptism of repentance preached and practiced by John served to prepare for the baptism Jesus practiced, which in turn paved the way for the New Testament baptism. Jesus succeeded the baptizing ministry that John began and directed His disciples to baptize even while He was still with them. In the Gospel according to John, we see a parenthetical statement that Jesus Himself did not baptize,

but His disciples did (Jn 4:2), although it was stated previously that Jesus and His disciples baptized (Jn 3:22; 4:1). From these facts we understand that the disciples of Jesus were carrying on a large-scale baptizing ministry, one that was even greater than John's, under Jesus' direction and supervision. Therefore, when Peter commanded the listeners to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost, baptism was already a practice familiar to the apostles and all the people, except that it had now acquired a new level of meaning and effect. From the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the establishment of the church and the propagation of the gospel to all nations, baptism never ceased to be a fundamental element in conversion and belief in the Lord Jesus.

# Chapter 5

## NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

### A. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

Before delving into the study of New Testament baptism, it is important to first look at what constitutes the New Testament. The word, “testament” appears three times in the NKJV (2Cor 3:14; Heb 9:16, 17). It translates the Greek word, διαθήκη, rendered elsewhere as “covenant.” As such, we may say that the New Testament, using biblical vocabulary, is the new covenant.

In simplest terms, a covenant is an agreement between two parties. In the Bible, God’s relationship with His people is defined by covenants. Through the divine covenants, God declared His will towards His people and established the conditions He expected them to observe.

We read in the Scriptures that there are two covenants (Gal 4:21–24). The old covenant refers to the covenant God established at Mount Sinai. The goal of the covenant was that the children of Israel may be a special treasure to God above all people, and that they should be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. To reap the covenantal blessings, the people must obey God’s voice and do all that He commanded. This covenant was sealed with a ceremony of blood (Ex 19:5, 6; 24:3–11).

Unfortunately, man, in his sinful flesh, is unable to live up to the condition established by this covenant. His failure to keep God’s covenant results in a curse:

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all*

*things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” (Gal 3:10)*

Man knows what is good and right but is powerless to carry it out. Even the sacrifices offered under the old covenant can only remind him of his sins (Heb 10:3). Therefore the covenant becomes one which gives birth to bondage (Gal 4:24). Everyone who wishes to be justified before God by observing the law is bound by the law which he cannot keep (cf. Gal 3:22).

Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness towards God’s covenant, God’s will remains the same. His desire is still to be the God of His people and for His children to acknowledge Him. Therefore, He promised a day when He would establish a new covenant:

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (Jer 31:31–34)*

This new covenant is a “better covenant” which is established on better promises (Heb 8:6–13). Unlike the old covenant, which was conditional upon man’s works, the new covenant is based on God’s grace. Whereas the old covenant featured outward and passive observance of the law, the new covenant is fulfilled through God’s work on each individual from within.

1. Through God’s indwelling Spirit

The new covenant promises that God will be the God of His people and His people will all know Him because God will put His law in their minds and write it on their hearts. This internalizing of God’s law and endowment of the knowledge of God is the work of God’s Spirit. God promises through

the prophet Ezekiel that He would put His Spirit within His people, resulting in their obedience:

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezek 36:26, 27)*

*Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (Eze 11:19, 20)*

The Lord Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit would dwell within the believers to teach them all things (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The new covenant is of the Spirit and not of the letter, written on the heart and not on tablets of stone (2Cor 3:1–17). In other words, the keeping of God’s law is no longer merely the external compliance to a legal code. Rather, the Holy Spirit works within each believer to transform them into the glorious likeness of the Lord.

Furthermore, the Spirit of God also seals God’s people as His own and causes them to acknowledge God as their Father.

*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal 4:6, 7)*

By guiding believers to live according to God, the Holy Spirit enables the believers to fully live out their status as sons of God.

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom 8:14–16)*

Through this, the promise of the new covenant, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people,” is fulfilled.

Such a great promise lies behind the numerous prophecies about the eschatological outpouring of God's Spirit. And this promise, foretold in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28, 29), was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when the exalted Lord Jesus poured out His Holy Spirit unto the believers (Acts 2:1–36). Henceforth, this gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to all who are called by God (Acts 2:38–39).

2. Through the blood of the new covenant

According to Jeremiah 31:31–34, God's promise to put His law in His people's minds and write it on their hearts is founded on this gracious offer: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (v. 34). The first covenant did not achieve its intended goal because of the people's sins. Unless their sins are removed and forgiven, they would not be able to restore a fellowship with God. Therefore, the prophecies concerning Israel's restoration hinged on the divine promise of the remission of sins (cf. Isa 40:1, 2; Jer 33:6–8; Ezek 36:33; 37:23; Dan 9:24; Mic 7:19; Zech 3:9).

In our study on the Old Testament shadow, we saw that under the old covenant, the law prescribed the offer of sacrifices as the means of atonement. The blood of the sacrificial animals and its application were central to the atonement rites. Through atonement, or the removal of guilt, the Israelites may be forgiven of their sins.

The shedding of blood also accompanied the establishment of the first covenant at Sinai. Moses, acting as the mediator of the covenant, took half of the blood of the offerings and sprinkled it on the altar. Then he read the Book of the Covenant in the hearing of the people. After the people made a pledge of obedience, Moses took the other half of the blood and sprinkled it on the people, calling it "the blood of the covenant." (Ex 24:3–8). The blood put the covenant into effect and purified the people and the tabernacle (Heb 9:18–22).

Therefore, blood was essential in the chosen people's covenantal relationship with God. Only through the atonement of blood could they approach and worship God. Thus the writer

of Hebrews concludes, “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb 9:22).

In reality, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. The law served as a shadow of the good things to come. The fact that sacrifices had to be offered continually under the old covenant shows that they were not able to remove sins. Instead, they reminded the people of their sins every year. In place of sacrifices and offerings, God prepared the ultimate Sacrifice—Jesus Christ, who came to do God’s will and offer His body for sins once for all (Heb 10:1–14). He is the Lamb who was slain to take away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29, 36; 1Cor 5:7; 1Pet 1:19).

As we have seen in our study of the Old Testament shadow, God has promised to cleanse and atone for His people. He fulfilled this promise by coming into the flesh Himself and shedding His own blood to effectuate the new covenant. For this reason the Lord Jesus spoke of His blood as “the blood of the new covenant” during the Last Supper, when He instituted the Holy Communion. This blood of the new covenant was shed for many for the remission of sins (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25).

With His own blood Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:23–26). He achieved atonement foreshadowed in the first covenant. Consequently, believers may receive the forgiveness of sins and enter God’s presence through the blood of Jesus (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 10:19–22). His blood is the price with which He redeems us to God (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:12; 1Pet 1:18, 19; Rev 5:9). With His blood He cleanses us from sin and sanctifies us (Heb 9:14; 13:12; 1Jn 1:7; Rev 1:5–6), thereby enabling us to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (cf. Ex 19:5, 6). The very intent of the former covenant is now fully met through the washing of the blood of Christ, the mediator of the new covenant.

Having examined what constitutes the new covenant, we may define the term “New Testament baptism” as the baptism instituted under the new covenant established by the blood of Jesus. More

specifically, it is the baptism the Lord commissioned after He had shed His blood on the cross and resurrected from the dead, and it was administered by the apostles after the pouring out of the promised Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Through the authority imparted by the Holy Spirit and the cleansing power of Jesus' precious blood, the church went forth and baptized. Those who are baptized and forgiven of their sins will receive the indwelling Spirit of God as promised in the new covenant.

## **B. THE COMMISSION OF THE RISEN LORD**

The commission given by the Lord to the disciples during His post-resurrection appearances is of pivotal significance to the establishment and mission of the church. Having achieved redemption and received all authority, the Lord Jesus sent the disciples into the world to spread the good news of salvation.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, the commission stands as the climax of the resurrection narrative. The eleven disciples gathered on the mountain in Galilee which Jesus had appointed. There, the Lord said to them,

*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Mt 28:18–20)<sup>19</sup>*

The Lord's command to go and make disciples of all the nations is founded on the cosmic authority He had been given. The making of disciples consists of two aspects: baptizing and teaching. In Jesus' exalted name, which is the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the church is to baptize all believers. The church then must also teach all of Christ's commands to the believers. The Lord Jesus finally promised continual abidance to the end of the age.

The command to baptize speaks of its significance in conversion as well as its place in the divine redemptive plan. Baptism is the

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19 See commentary on Mt 28:16–20.



very means instituted by the risen Lord Himself through which a believer becomes His follower. The effectiveness of baptism for conversion is endowed by the resurrected Christ and rests on the authority He has been given. Therefore, baptism is not mere a ceremony. It is a divine establishment that accomplishes Christ's saving work in the world.

As a part of the commission, the baptism that the church will administer is to be distinguished from all the baptisms that preceded it. The baptism of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus' disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry turned the people to God and prepared them for the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. The baptism commanded in the commission, on the other hand, brings the baptized into the ownership of the risen Lord. Whereas the baptisms preceding the Lord's exaltation focused on the nation of Israel, and converts came out to the baptists to be baptized, the disciples are now to go into the whole world and baptize disciples of all nations, wherever they may be.

The Markan account, like that of Matthew, records the Lord's command to bring the gospel into the whole world: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15, 16).<sup>20</sup> The promise of salvation accompanies the commission, and it is given to those who believe and are baptized. Here, baptism is intimately connected to belief and salvation. It accompanies and expresses one's faith in the Lord, and salvation is the fruit of those who receive it in faith.

Luke does not record the commission per se, but states it indirectly with a focus on the fulfillment of prophecy and divine purpose, followed by instructions to wait for the Holy Spirit:

*Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Lk 24:46-49)*

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20 See commentary on Mk 16:14-18.

Now that Christ had fulfilled His redemptive work, the disciples are to be His witnesses and preach repentance and remission of sins in His name to all nations. But before embarking on this mission, they needed to first tarry in Jerusalem until they receive power from on high. Luke mentions neither baptism nor the Holy Spirit, yet both are implied. Baptism follows a person's repentance and is the means for receiving the remission of sins. The Holy Spirit is the power from on high promised by the Father. We also note that the mission to preach and baptize for the remission of sins would begin only with the coming of the Promised Spirit. This underscores the fact that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the administration of New Testament baptism.

The account in the Gospel of John emphasizes yet another aspect of the Lord's commission:

*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Jn 20:21-23)*

Here, Christ sent His disciples and promised them the authority to forgive and retain sins. This authority comes from the Holy Spirit. "Receive," λάβετε, is in the imperative, indicating that the Lord was commanding the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit. As recorded in Luke and Acts, the actual reception of the Holy Spirit would come later in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

The account in the Gospel of John is significant in that it reveals the definite connection between receiving Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins. This is consistent with Luke's account. The disciples were hereby sent by the Lord, but to carry out the commission, which involves baptizing for the remission of sins, the disciples needed the authority given by the Holy Spirit and therefore must tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. This is the reason that the coming of the Holy Spirit was crucial to the administration of New Testament baptism.

Placing side by side the post-resurrection commands of the Lord recorded in the four gospels, we have a complete picture of the

Great Commission. This also helps us appreciate even more the significance and purpose of baptism as well as its relationship with the promised Holy Spirit. Although baptism is not explicitly mentioned in Luke and John because of the difference in focus, we see that the Lord instituted and commanded baptism in the commission as necessary for the remission of sins. Denney, as cited by Beasley-Murray, states this point well: "In all its forms the commission has to do either with baptism (so in Matthew and Mark) or with the remission of sins (so in Luke and John). These are but two forms of the same thing, for in the world of New Testament ideas baptism and the remission of sins are inseparably associated."<sup>21</sup> To this we shall add that the Lord's commission also makes it clear that the remission of sins in baptism is possible because of Christ's redemptive work and the authority given by the Holy Spirit.

The injunction to baptize, being at the heart of the Lord's commission, is to be obeyed as the church fulfills its mission to evangelize the world until the end of the age. On the basis of Christ's atoning work, the cosmic authority given to His name, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, baptism is effective for the remission of sins and salvation. The risen Lord Himself instituted baptism, commanded it, and grants His saving grace through it. Therefore, the crucial place of baptism in Christian conversion must not be dismissed or neglected.

### **C. THE UNIVERSAL PRACTICE OF BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

We can observe from reading the New Testament that the church in the apostolic era baptized its believers. The narratives in Acts where baptism accompanied conversion provide direct evidence that the apostles faithfully carried out the Lord's commission to baptize as part of the making of disciples. We shall turn to these in the next section.

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<sup>21</sup> Denney, J. (1903). *The Death of Christ : Its place and interpretation in the New Testament*. (4th ed.). London: H & S. 73; Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1973). *Baptism in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 80.

In addition to the explicit records of baptism in Acts, we also have indirect testimony in the epistles. When addressing members of Christ's body, the writers take for granted that all believers are baptized. The following references should serve to illustrate this point:

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (Rom 6:3)*

*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1Cor 1:13)*

*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. (1Cor 12:13)*

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Gal 3:27)*

*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Col 2:11, 12)*

*There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1Pet 3:21)*

If the New Testament church did not universally baptize its members, and if baptism was not demanded of its believers, it would be difficult to explain the assumption made by the writers of these passages that all believers are baptized. In the mind of the New Testament writers, no believer is unbaptized.

Barth's argument that the New Testament bears witness to the prevalence of baptism in the early church is worth quoting:

The fact, however, that from the very first all Christians seem to have requested and received baptism is by no means self-explanatory. Why did the primitive community have to be a community of the baptized and a baptizing community? Was this necessary? Could it not be content with the baptism of the Holy Ghost which it had either received or was expecting, with its faith in Jesus Christ and all that this included by way of gifts and obligations? Could it not proclaim the message about Him

without bringing both itself and those who accepted this message, its faith, Jesus Christ Himself, under the rule proclaimed in Ac. 2.38: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you,” or in Mk. 16.16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”? No matter how we expound Jn. 3.5, what is the need for the interconnection evident in the verse: A man enters the kingdom when born ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, and not without either the one or the other? How many exegetes have wished they could cut these verses out of the New Testament, since then everything would be, or would appear to be, much simpler! But there they are, and in their own place they have to be taken into account and honored. One can expound them, one can explain the surprisingly self-evident attitude of the primitive community and its members which finds expression in them, only if one accepts the fact that the community and its members were under the pressure of an imperious—because authoritative—injunction in this matter—so imperious that in the main they could recognize it only by actually taking the step of human decision which was demanded and by practically regarding it as self-evident in the way they did as men who had received such an order, and who could only follow it, even if they would rather things had been different and baptism dispensable. Can this matter be explained solely and simply by the existence of the baptismal command of Mt. 28.19, which from a literary standpoint is very isolated, and was not perhaps known to all everywhere and from the very beginning? Is this any more than the agent and formulation of a very different and true command which was issued directly in and with the manifestation of the history of Jesus Christ? We shall not pursue this question here, but simply state the sure and certain fact that the primitive Church acted in this matter as if it had received an absolutely normative command which it could not evade keeping and which it thus accepted without dispute.<sup>22</sup>

The weight of the evidence in the Scripture speaks for the early church’s faithfulness to the Lord’s commission to baptize. It also demonstrates that the church viewed baptism as a necessity for all believers.

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22 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956–75), 46–47.

# Chapter 6

## BAPTISMS RECORDED IN ACTS

As we have seen in Luke, the Lord designated the disciples as His witnesses. But the disciples must wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:46–49). Acts, as a continuation of the Gospel according to Luke, begins by recapturing the post-resurrection works and words of Christ. To prepare the apostles for their mission, the resurrected Lord presented Himself alive by many infallible proofs and spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1–3). Finally, He spoke to them about the promise of the Holy Spirit:

*And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:4–8)*

The words of the Lord to the apostles laid the foundation as well as set the direction for the Christian mission as recorded in Acts. He promised them power through the Holy Spirit, which would enable them to complete the Great Commission from Jerusalem to the end of the earth.

As pointed out before, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is essential for the Christian mission particularly because forgiveness and retaining of sins is given by the Spirit. Therefore, the descent of the Holy Spirit would also signify the beginning of New Testament baptism, which was a crucial aspect of the apostles’ mission.

#### A. THE DAY OF PENTECOST (ACTS 2:1–40)<sup>23</sup>

The mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost launched the great work commissioned by Christ. The great sound that accompanied the Holy Spirit's descent drew the multitude in Jerusalem, who gathered in amazement at the miraculous and unprecedented event. Peter grasped the opportunity and preached to this ready audience about Christ. He explained that the coming of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the Scriptures' prophecies and testified that Jesus had risen and been exalted as Lord and Savior.

Cut to the heart by Peter's message, the devout men of Jerusalem asked the apostles what they must do. Peter's response consists of a command as well as a promise:

*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:38, 39)*

Repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ result in the remission of sins and the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of baptism is the remission of sins. Repentance alone cannot result in the remission of sins, but must be followed by baptism. It is in baptism that the effect of remission of sins takes place. Baptism is received in the name of Jesus Christ because baptism is administered on account of Christ's authority and is received with faith in Christ.

On the basis of Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation, the washing away of sins promised in the new covenant had now become a reality through baptism. Those who repent and are baptized shall also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is also a promise of the new covenant.

Peter's call to action shows that baptism is closely related to repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, the remission of sins, and the promised Holy Spirit. It encapsulates the central place of baptism in conversion.

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23 See commentary on Acts 2:37–41.

Those who gladly received Peter's word were baptized, "and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). These believers' baptism consummated their response to the gospel and marked their entrance into the Christian community. Through baptism, God Himself adds members to His church.

#### **B. THE MISSION TO SAMARIA (ACTS 8:4-17)<sup>24</sup>**

The great persecution that arose against the church as a result of Stephen's death prompted the church's expansion beyond Jerusalem. Believers who were scattered went everywhere to preach. Thus a new phase in the Christian mission began.

In the midst of this evangelizing fervor, Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. Miracles of casting out of demons and healing accompanied Philip's preaching and led the people of Samaria to accept the gospel. Luke notes, "When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12). Baptism is the response of faith in Christ and His gospel, and the work of leading people to Christ must include baptism.

Thus we may observe here the progression in the conversion of the people of Samaria. They heard and saw the miracles Philip did, which caused them to heed the things spoken by Philip. Hearing the gospel led to belief, and belief, in turn, resulted in acceptance of baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (cf. v. 16). Baptism consummates the response to the gospel call.

#### **C. CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (ACTS 8:26-40)<sup>25</sup>**

After Philip had evangelized in Samaria, an angel of the Lord instructed him to go down to a desert road, where he met the Ethiopian eunuch. As we can see in the ministry in Samaria, the spreading of the gospel had begun crossing racial boundaries. Here also, in the story of the conversion of the eunuch, we have a

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<sup>24</sup> See commentary on Acts 8:4-17.

<sup>25</sup> See commentary on Acts 8:26-40.



record of the conversion of a devout worshipper of God who was not a Jew.

Led by the Spirit to approach the eunuch, who was riding on his chariot and reading the scroll of Isaiah, Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch expressed the need for someone to explain the passage to him and invited Philip unto his chariot. Philip began at that Scripture and preached Jesus to him.

When they came to some water along the road, the eunuch requested to be baptized. Both he and Philip went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Luke does not tell us the specific things Philip said in his preaching, but the fact that the eunuch requested baptism shows that Philip had explained to him about the need for baptism. It also shows that preaching Jesus must include also the doctrine of baptism, for faith in Jesus leads to baptism for the remission of sins. The conversion of the eunuch began with preaching about Jesus and ended with baptism. Thus, baptism is a necessary and crucial part of preaching and conversion. After the eunuch had been baptized, Philip's ministry to the eunuch was completed, and the Spirit caught Philip away.

#### **D. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL (ACTS 9:17–19; 22:12–26)<sup>26</sup>**

The miraculous calling and conversion of Saul presents another pivotal point in the book of Acts. Saul, a leader in the persecution of the church, personally met the Lord Jesus while he was on His way to arrest the Christians in Damascus. Trembling and astonished at the voice of Jesus and blinded by the light from heaven, Saul went into Damascus according to the Lord's instruction. Then the Lord sent Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, to meet Saul and lay his hands on him so that Saul may receive sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Lord restored Saul's sight through Ananias, and Ananias conveyed to Saul the Lord's will for Saul to be His witness. Then Ananias urged Saul, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Saul had been personally called by the Lord

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<sup>26</sup> See commentary on Acts 22:12–16.

from heaven, been revealed of His will for him, experienced the loss and healing of his sight, received the laying on of hands. But none of these cleansed him of his sins. He must be baptized and wash away his sins. Miraculous encounters with God and experiencing His grace, while crucial in a person's conversion, do not remove a person's sins.

Acts 22:16 is one of the most direct statements in the Bible that connect baptism and washing away of sins. The two imperative verbs in Ananias' words, "Be baptized," and "Wash away" indicate that baptism is for the purpose of washing away of sins and the washing away of sins is the direct result of baptism. This relationship speaks of the necessity of baptism in conversion.

#### **E. THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS (ACTS 10:1–48)<sup>27</sup>**

With a lengthy narrative, Acts recounts God's choosing and conversion of Cornelius as well as Peter's explanation to those of the circumcision for his actions. This event was a major breakthrough in the development of the church because through it God miraculously opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Cornelius, a devout and God fearing man was instructed by an angel to invite Peter to speak to him the words by which he and all his household would be saved. In the meantime, the Lord through a vision prepared Peter to acknowledge God's election of these Gentiles. When he arrived at Cornelius' house, Peter realized the purpose for which he had been sent. Then he preached to Cornelius and his relatives and close friends about Jesus Christ and remission of sins through belief in His name.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. This was astonishing to the circumcised believers who had gone there with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even upon these Gentiles. Such a clear election of God was unthinkable in the mind of many Jews.

But Peter's work did not stop here. When he saw that the Gentiles had also received the Holy Spirit, he answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received

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<sup>27</sup> See commentary on Acts 10:44–48.

the Holy Spirit just as we have?” Then he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:47, 48). The sealing of the Gentiles with the promised Holy Spirit did not eliminate the need for baptism. Baptism in the name of the Lord was still necessary for the remission of sins.

Through baptism, these Gentiles were brought into the body of Christ just as the devout Jews were added to the church through baptism on Pentecost. Baptism unites Jews and Gentiles alike as one in Christ Jesus and removes the ethnic division between them (Gal 3:27-29).

#### **F. THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA (ACTS 16:13–15)<sup>28</sup>**

Led by the Lord through a vision, Paul and Silas came to Philippi on Paul’s second missionary journey. Lydia, a seller of purple and worshipper of God, was the first to respond to the gospel. Luke records that the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. In the very next sentence, we read, “And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’” (Acts 16:15). “When she and her household were baptized” captures the conversion of Lydia and her household in this very brief account. As we have noted before, baptism marks a believer’s entrance into the spiritual community. Therefore, we the readers are expected to understand the mention of the baptism of Lydia and of her household as the visible outcome of her belief in the Lord Jesus.

#### **G. THE CONVERSION OF THE JAILER (ACTS 16:16–40)<sup>29</sup>**

While preaching in Philippi, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison as a result of casting out an evil spirit from a girl and the riot instigated by the girl’s masters. A great earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, opening all the doors and loosening the prisoners’ chains. Just when the jailer was about to kill himself,

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28 See commentary on Acts 16:13–15.

29 See commentary on Acts 16:29–34.

supposing that all the prisoners had fled, Paul intervened and saved his life.

The jailer felled down trembling before Paul and Silas, and asked what he must do to be saved. They responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” After they had spoken the word of the Lord to him and his household, the jailer took the apostles, washed their stripes. “Immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:29-33). The response to the call to “believe on the Lord Jesus” involved receiving baptism. The immediacy with which the apostles baptized the jailer and his family shows not only the jailer’s eagerness to believe in the Lord and be saved, but also the necessity of baptism in one’s faith and salvation.

#### **H. THE BAPTISM OF THE DISCIPLES IN EPHESUS (ACTS 19:1–7)<sup>30</sup>**

While Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he found some disciples. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and realized that these disciples had not received nor heard of the Holy Spirit. The disciples’ response prompted Paul to inquire about their baptism: “Into what then were you baptized?” (Acts 19:3). They replied that they had been baptized into John’s baptism. Paul explained to them that the baptism of John was a baptism of repentance and its purpose was to lead the people to believe on Christ Jesus. After hearing Paul’s words, these disciples were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul laid hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came on them.

Apparently, some of those who had been baptized by John and accepted his preaching about Jesus had not heard of the preaching of the gospel after Pentecost. Therefore, they were not aware that the promised Holy Spirit had come or the need to be baptized into the Lord Jesus. The baptism of John was a preparation for the coming of Christ, leading the people to repentance and faith in Jesus. After Christ’s exaltation and the pouring out of the Holy

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<sup>30</sup> See commentary on Acts 19:1–7.

Spirit, John's baptism was no longer sufficient. A believer needed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus for the remission of his sins in order to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.

This narrative helps us understand that baptism is not merely an external rite. Whether a believer is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus determines whether he can partake of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, proper baptism is also crucial. Now that Christ had been exalted and the Holy Spirit had come, baptism had to be carried out and received in the name of the Lord Jesus. Those who are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Receiving of the Holy Spirit, therefore, while being a distinct experience from baptism, is intimately tied with one's baptism.

# Chapter 7

## NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON BAPTISM

### A. MEANING OF βαπτίζω

The English word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word βαπτίζω. A related Greek word, βάπτω, means “to dip in or under.” It was used of tempering the red-hot steel, dying the hair, glazing earthen vessels, or filling by dipping in. It was also used of a ship that sank.<sup>31</sup> βάπτω in the New Testament carries the same meaning (cf. Lk 16:24; Jn 13:26; Rev 19:13).

βαπτίζω in Greek literature meant “to immerse,” “to sink,” “to suffer shipwreck,” “to drown,” or “to perish.” Figuratively, it is used of “bringing a city to the border of destruction,” “sinking into deep sleep,” or “being overwhelmed.”<sup>32</sup>

In the LXX, the word βαπτίζω appears twice in the canonical scriptures. In Isa 21:4, the prophet says “fearfulness frightened me” (ἡ ἀνομία με βαπτίζει). The word βαπτίζει, which translates the Hebrew word **בעה**, is used figuratively to mean to overwhelm.<sup>33</sup> The other passage is 2Kgs 5:14. The prophet Elisha had instructed Naaman to wash in the Jordan seven times. In the end, he obeyed and “dipped” (ἐβαπτίσατο) seven times in the Jordan. The Hebrew word which the LXX translates as ἐβαπτίσατο is **טבל**. Where it is used in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, this Hebrew word always

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31 Kenneth Samuel Wuest, *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 70-71.

32 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 1:530.

33 Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their Bearing on Christian Doctrine* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1998), 154.

means “to dip” (Gen 37:31; Ex 12:22; Lev 4:6, 17; 9:9; 14:6, 16, 51; Num 19:18; Deut 33:24; Josh 3:15; Ruth 2:14; 1Sam 14:27; 2Kgs 8:15; Job 9:31).

βαπτίζω appears 77 times in the New Testament. It is used predominately in reference to the rite of immersion in water, including the baptism of John the Baptist, the baptism Jesus’ disciples administered, and the baptism by the church after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In addition, the word is also used of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16). In Mark 7:4, where it speaks of the tradition of the elders, the word denotes a washing of purification. On a few occasions, the word conveys a metaphorical sense. Mark 10:38, 39 and Luke 12:50, the Lord Jesus mentioned the baptism He was to be baptized with, alluding to the overwhelming sufferings He would undergo. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, Paul employs the Christian term “baptize” to depict the experience of the Israelites through the deliverance of Moses. Their journey under the cloud and through the sea was a kind of baptism.

The noun forms of βαπτίζω are βαπτισμός and βάπτισμα. βαπτισμός denotes the act, and may include various ceremonial washings as well as baptism (Mk 7:4; Heb 6:2; 9:10). βάπτισμα, a word not found outside the New Testament and always used in the singular, is a special term used of the institution we know as baptism (except for Mk 10:38, 39; Lk 12:50).<sup>34</sup>

Some commentators argue that βαπτίζω in such passages as Romans 6:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 is used purely as a metaphor apart from the rite of immersion in water. For example, Wuest believes that Romans 6:1–4 should be translated, “As many as were introduced (placed) into Christ Jesus, into His death were introduced. Therefore we were buried with Him through the aforementioned introduction into His death.” Likewise, according to Wuest, 1 Corinthians 12:13 should be translated, “For through the instrumentality of one Spirit were we all placed into one body.”<sup>35</sup>

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34 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 1:545.

35 Kenneth Samuel Wuest, *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 73.

This view is problematic on several levels. Words such as “introduced” or “placed” are far in meaning from “dip” or “immerse.” In no other passages is βαπτίζω translated this way. Furthermore, while the context may allow for or suggest a metaphorical use of βαπτίζω, it does not mean that it cannot also refer to the rite of baptism. The position to exclude baptism from the interpretation of the passages is based on the interpreter’s theological view, not on exegetical grounds.

The word βαπτίζω certainly has its metaphorical usage and does not always denote physical immersion. When John the Baptist proclaimed that the Coming One would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, he was not speaking of literal immersion in fire (cf. Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). But as Dun states correctly, “To say ‘metaphor’ does not exclude ‘sacrament.’”<sup>36</sup> Neither Romans 6:1–4 nor 1 Corinthians 12:13, for example, demand exclusion of the sacrament of baptism even if βαπτίζω is understood metaphorically. Substituting “introduced” for “baptized” in order to remove the sacrament of baptism from the passage begs the questions of what the “introduction” is and when this “introduction” takes place. But if we accept βαπτίζω to mean the sacrament of baptism as well as metaphorical immersion into Christ’s death, then the point is clear: We were immersed into Christ’s death through baptism. In the same way, translating “placed into one body” in 1 Corinthians 12:13 in order to eliminate the sacrament of baptism is unnecessary. A believer is placed into the body of Christ when he is baptized (cf. Acts 2:41). Therefore, we may understand “baptized into one body” as alluding to the result: i.e., being added to the body of Christ, as well as the means: i.e., through the sacrament of baptism.

## B. SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BAPTISM

### 1. Baptism as a sacrament

The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, which translates the Greek word for “mystery” (μυστήριον).

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<sup>36</sup> James D.G. Dun, “‘Baptized’ as Metaphor,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the church*, vol. 171 of *Journal for the study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, ed. Stanley Porter and Anthony R. Cross, (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 310.



This term has come to be used of Christian rituals such as baptism.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus instituted three rituals and commanded their observance for effecting a relationship with the Lord and for salvation. These are baptism, foot-washing, and the Holy Communion. We may use the term “sacrament” to collectively refer to these institutions based on their common characteristics as described.

Externally, sacraments involve symbolic actions with the use of physical elements. There are numerous examples of inspired symbolic actions in the Bible, especially in the prophetic writings (Gen 15:5, Isa 8:1–4, Isa 20, Jer 13:1–7; 16:1–6; 27:1, 2, Ezek 4:1–3, 9–15, 24:15–18, Acts 21:10, 11; etc.). God used actions or objects to convey His message or predict future events. Like these symbolic actions, the external symbols of sacraments carry certain meaning. They signify spiritual realities as well as teach spiritual truths.

Sacraments also have internal characteristics. Sacraments are unique in that those who receive them through faith experience the spiritual effects promised by the Lord. Thus, for example, baptism is not merely a symbol that points to a reality apart from the ritual itself. Those who receive baptism through faith enter into a saving relationship with Christ and the effect of remission of sins takes place through the act of baptizing. This spiritual reality is the work of God.

Hence, sacraments consist of an outward form and inward effects. God acts through the symbols established by the Lord Jesus to bring about salvation for the individuals who receive them.

## 2. External spiritual characteristics

The sacrament of baptism, by definition, carries a specific external form. We shall examine later, based on the Scripture’s description of baptism, how baptism is to be carried out. In this section of the study, we will first look at the symbolic meaning behind the form of baptism.

a. Living water

The use of water for baptism symbolizes the fact that baptism is a spiritual washing (cf. Acts 22:16; 1Pet 3:21). The Old Testament purification laws required washing with water for cleansing from defilement. This washing with water prefigures the cleansing we receive through Christ and is fulfilled in the baptism under the new covenant.

In a few particular purification rites, the LORD required the use of running water (Lev 14:1–8; 48–53; 15:13; Num 19:17). “Running water,” (מַיִם חַיִּים) is literally “living water.” It is used in the Scripture as a symbol of a continuous source of life.

In the prophetic writing, the LORD uses this expression to describe Himself.

*For My people have committed two evils:  
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,  
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold  
no water. (Jer 2:13)*

The LORD laments that His people has forsaken Him and made for themselves other gods. The LORD is the fountain of living waters. All other gods are broken cisterns that can hold no water. The fountain of living water is natural, abundant, and continuous. The broken cisterns are manmade, lacking, and temporary. God is the everlasting source of life. Idols, in contrast, are utterly useless.

The prophet Jeremiah echoes the LORD’s words in his prayer:

*O Lord, the hope of Israel,  
All who forsake You shall be ashamed.  
“Those who depart from Me  
Shall be written in the earth,  
Because they have forsaken the Lord,  
The fountain of living waters.” (Jer 17:13)*

In an eschatological prophecy, Zechariah speaks of the opening of a fountain.

*In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. (Zec 13:1)*

The purpose of this fountain is clearly expressed as the instrument of cleansing from sin and uncleanness. Not only is God the source of life, He is also the source of cleansing. He will provide cleansing for His people. Although “living waters” is not mentioned here, the reference to “fountain” as in Jer 2:13 and 17:13 suggests that living water is in view and it can be symbolic of cleansing. This was the function of living water in the purification laws.

Zechariah also prophesied that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, the city of God:

*And in that day it shall be—  
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,  
Half of them toward the eastern sea  
And half of them toward the western sea;  
In both summer and winter it shall occur. (Zech 14:8)*

Similarly, in Revelation God promises the fountain of the water of life to those who thirst:

*And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.” (Rev 21:6; cf. 22:17)*

This river of water of life proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:1). Hence, in both Zechariah’s prophecy and the vision in Revelation, God is the source of the fountain of living water, a symbol of everlasting life.

Jesus also speaks of the fountain of living water:

*Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” ... “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (Jn 4:10–14)*

*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (Jn 7:38)*

The living water that Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit, which becomes a fountain in the believer that springs up into everlasting life.

From all of the references cited here, we see that living water is symbolic of the life and cleansing that issue directly from God. God Himself cleanses us from sin and gives us abundant eternal life. Therefore, the living water in which baptism is administered serves as a symbol of the spiritual cleansing and eternal life from God.

b. Bowing of head

In baptism the sinner dies and is buried with Christ Jesus (Rom 6:3–8). Inwardly, the body of sin is put away (Rom 6:6; Col 2:11). Outwardly, the sinner unites together in the likeness of Christ's death by bowing his head as Christ did on the cross (Jn 19:30).

i. Humility, shame, and disgrace

The bowing of head is symbolic of being burdened with the weight and shame of sin. The following verses illustrate this:

*For my iniquities have gone over my head;  
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." (Ps 38:4)*

*For innumerable evils have surrounded me;  
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to  
look up;*

*They are more than the hairs of my head;  
Therefore my heart fails me." (Ps 40:12)*

*And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so  
much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, say-  
ing, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Lk 18:13)*

*And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humili-  
ated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities  
have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown  
up to the heavens." (Ezr 9:6)*

The iniquities are so great and weigh down with shame that the sinner cannot lift up his face before God.

Job speaks of his utter helplessness before the holy God when God searches out sin,

*If I am wicked, woe to me;  
Even if I am righteous, I cannot lift up my head.  
I am full of disgrace;  
See my misery!  
If my head is exalted, You hunt me like a fierce lion,  
And again You show Yourself awesome against me.  
(Job 10:15–16)*

Job found himself unable to lift up his head to defend his case before the almighty God. He was in disgrace and misery.

The bowing of head is also a gesture of humbling oneself before God, as God describes the fasting of the Israelites:

*Is it a fast that I have chosen,  
A day for a man to afflict his soul?  
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush,  
And to spread out sackcloth and ashes?  
Would you call this a fast,  
And an acceptable day to the Lord? (Isa 58:5)*

The prophet Jeremiah speaks figuratively of the bowing of the head as a depiction of the humiliation and sorrow of Jerusalem:

*The elders of the daughter of Zion  
Sit on the ground and keep silence;  
They throw dust on their heads  
And gird themselves with sackcloth.  
The virgins of Jerusalem  
Bow their heads to the ground. (Lam 2:10)*

## ii. Worship and surrender

The act of bowing the head represents a person's humility before someone of status (cf. Gen 43:28; Num 22:31). It was a gesture of worshiping the LORD (Gen 24:26, 48; Ex 4:31; 12:27; 34:8; 1Chron 29:20; 2Chron 20:18; 29:30; Neh 8:6).

In His final moment on the cross, Jesus bowed His head:

*So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.  
(Jn 19:30)*

Here we see that the bowing of head was a sign of surrender. Having completed all that He had been sent to do, the Lord Jesus committed His spirit into the Father's hands (cf. Lk 23:46). Jesus' bowing His head was deliberate, not the natural result of His death. And the writer of the Fourth Gospel records this detail for a purpose. It is very clear in the Greek that He bowed His head before He gave up His Spirit (Jn 19:30).<sup>37</sup> The Lord Jesus bowed His head on the cross as a sign of total surrender to the heavenly Father. Subsequently, He entrusted His spirit to the Father. He left behind the outward likeness of His death as a prototype for us to follow when we are baptized today (Rom 6:5). This sign also teaches believers that baptism entails living a life of submission and dedication.

The bowing of the head in baptism is a union with Christ in the likeness of His death. Based on the symbolic meaning of this action that we have examined, we can conclude that it also symbolizes the death of the sinful man and total surrender to God to live a new life (Rom 6:5–11).

### c. Immersion

#### i. Covering over sin

We have noted that the word "baptize" itself carries the meaning of dipping or immersing. Paul describes the journey of the Israelites under the cloud and through the sea as being baptized into Moses (1Cor 10:1, 2). Thus the action of baptizing or immersing places the object through and under something so that it is covered over. In this sense, immersion in baptism is symbolic of our sin being covered over.

The Scripture speaks of God's remission of sins metaphorically as covering over sin. David says that "Blessed

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<sup>37</sup> See commentary on Romans 6:1–10.

is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered" (Ps 32:1). As we have studied under the Old Testament shadow of baptism, the meaning of "atone" (כִּפֶּר) is to cover over. The covering over is not to merely conceal, but to annul. The atonement by blood in the old covenant is now fulfilled in the new covenant. God has promised that He would atone for the sins of His people. Micah extols God's grace of forgiveness this way:

*Who is a God like You,  
Pardoning iniquity  
And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His  
heritage?  
He does not retain His anger forever,  
Because He delights in mercy.  
He will again have compassion on us,  
And will subdue our iniquities.  
You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.  
(Mic 7:18, 19)*

As promised, God Himself provided atonement through the precious blood of Christ. He uses the blood of Christ to cover over and remove our sins. This marvelous grace of pardon and passing over of transgression is depicted in the symbolic act of immersion in water during baptism.

## ii. Burial into death

Paul tells the believers that they were baptized into Christ's death (Rom 6:3). This death with Christ is by means of a burial. He states that we were buried with Christ through baptism into death (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). He uses the special term, *συνθάπτω*, which is literally "buried together," to describe this process. We are buried together with Christ through baptism into His death.

Normally, a person dies first before he is buried. But a Christian dies by being buried. His burial is the process through which He enters death. This burial, of course, is not a physical one. In the spiritual realm, his body of sin is done away with by having His sins completely covered

over. But this spiritual burial corresponds with the outward act of dipping or immersing. The person's sinful being is buried just as his body is "buried" in water. Once again, the external form of baptism symbolizes the internal effect of baptism.

### 3. Internal spiritual characteristics

We have seen that the external characteristics of baptism, i.e., the outward elements and actions of baptism, symbolize the cleansing of sins and burial of the sinful man. The fact that the form of baptism consists of symbolic actions is often interpreted to mean that baptism itself has no real spiritual effect on the soul of the person being baptized. This interpretation of symbols leads to the view that baptism is "only symbolic" of a spiritual reality that has already occurred, and that baptism itself does not bring about the effects it symbolizes. However, this is a misunderstanding of symbols.

Vorgrimler explains:

*A being realizes itself by expressing itself. To put it another way: a symbol is effective because it brings a being to reality. That is what is meant by 'real symbol': a genuine symbol does what it symbolizes... Anyone who has understood the essential character of symbolism cannot play off the 'merely symbolic' against the real.<sup>38</sup>*

Hence, symbol and reality are not opposites. To say that something is symbolic does not mean that it is devoid of the reality that it symbolizes. While a symbolic action may symbolize another reality apart from itself, it is not necessarily always so. A symbolic action can be effective and embody the reality it symbolizes. According to the Bible's teachings about baptism, baptism belongs to this kind of symbol. It is symbolic *and* effective.

While it is generally accepted that the actions and elements in baptism do have their symbolic meaning, the key question here is this: Does the spiritual effect that the act of baptism symbolizes take place in baptism or prior to baptism? In other

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38 Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 10.



words, is a person cleansed of his sins and buried together with Christ into His death during baptism or before he is baptized? We will demonstrate from the Scripture that the external spiritual characteristics of baptism in fact symbolize its internal spiritual characteristics. Baptism is not only symbolic, but is also effective for the remission of sins and burial of the sinful man.

Those who heard the message of the apostles were cut to the heart when they realized that Jesus was Lord and Christ. Therefore, they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37, 38). “For the remission of your sins,” (εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν) indicates the purpose of receiving baptism. Some exegetes translate εἰς as “in view of” or “because of” and argue that Peter was asking the multitude to be baptized in view of the remission of sins they had already received. The intent of the argument is to remove the effect of remission of sins from baptism. This view, however, does not stand grammatically or contextually.<sup>39</sup>

Peter’s command is direct and simple: “Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus so that your sins will be forgiven.” Even though the Holy Spirit was already at work in these devout men, as evident in the fact that Peter’s message cut to their heart, and they had expressed their desire to accept Jesus as Lord and Christ, Peter did not pronounce them as having been saved. They still needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.

Ananias, in like manner, also commanded Saul to be baptized, saying, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).<sup>40</sup> The effect and purpose of baptism is the washing away of sins. Baptism, therefore, is a spiritual washing through which God cleanses the sinner from all his sins.

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<sup>39</sup> See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Acts 2:37–41.

<sup>40</sup> See the commentary on Acts 9:17–19 and Acts 22:12–16.

The Lord's calling of Saul was clear. God shone a great light around him and blinded him while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians. The Lord spoke to him through a voice and revealed to him that He was Jesus whom he was persecuting. Saul acknowledged Jesus as Lord and asked Him what he must do. The Lord directed him to go into the city for further instructions. Through Ananias, the Lord restored Saul's sight and foretold to him his mission as the Lord's witness. However, none of these miraculous experiences from the Lord or Saul's acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord had removed his sins. He was still a sinner before God and stood in need of cleansing. For this reason, Ananias urged him to arise and be baptized.

Conversion experiences such as direct revelation, healing, and a complete change of heart are all important ways through which God leads a person to Christ. But they do not wash away sins. While the work of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the word of God can move a person to confess Jesus as Lord and repent of his sins, the effect of the washing away of sins is found in baptism.

When writing to the Colossians, Paul stated that they were circumcised in Christ with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11). By this spiritual circumcision the sinful man is abolished. According to Romans 6:6, the old man was crucified with Christ and the believer has died with Christ. Paul was describing the remission of sins in Christ. Christ effectively removes the sins of the believer by putting to death the sinful man in him. In Christ the believer has died with Christ to sin (cf. Col 2:20; 3:3; 1Pet 2:24).

When does a believer die with Christ? Paul writes:

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3-4)*

A believer dies with Christ when he is baptized. He is buried with Christ into death through baptism. In Colossians 2:11, 12, Paul similarly points out that Christ circumcises the believer and puts off the body of flesh by burying him in baptism.<sup>41</sup> Baptism is the means through which God puts to death and buries the old man, and thereby cleanses and forgives the believer of all his sins. For this reason, having stated that we are buried with Christ and raised with Christ in baptism, Paul continues, “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:13). The forgiveness of sins is the premise for making the sinner alive together with Christ, and this grace of forgiveness and spiritual resurrection is given to us in baptism.

a. The Source of Remission of Sins

i. The blood of Jesus Christ

The Scripture teaches us that the forgiveness of sins comes from the redemption through the blood of Christ. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). The Lord Jesus shed His blood for this very purpose. Thus He said during the first Holy Communion, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt 26:28). Not only did He shed His blood to pay the penalty of our sins, He also washed us from our sins in His own blood (Rev 1:5).

Hebrews discusses extensively the typology of Christ’s sacrifice. Once a year the high priest entered the most holy place with the blood of the sin offering. He sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat to make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel (Lev 16:11–17; Heb 9:7). This foreshadowed of the atonement through Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the good things to come. Having obtained eternal redemption, the Lord Jesus entered heaven with His own blood

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41 See the more detailed explanation in the commentaries on Rom 6:1–10 and Col 2:11–13.

once for all (Heb 9:11, 12, 23–26). The blood of Christ, therefore, established the new covenant and purifies us from our sins.

The blood of bulls could not take away sins. They were only a reminder of sin every year (Heb 10:1–4). The sacrifices under the old covenant had to be offered continually year by year because they could not remove the “consciousness of sins.” The Greek word translated “consciousness” is *συνείδησις*, meaning “conscience.” In other words, they provided external purification but could not purify the conscience defiled by sin (cf. Heb 9:9). The blood of Christ, in contrast, cleanses our conscience from dead works so we can serve the living God (Heb 9:14). By the blood of Jesus we may draw near to God by a new a living way (Heb 10:19). Using the language of purification rites in the Old Testament, Hebrews speaks of the status of believers as “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22).<sup>42</sup>

The cleansing of the conscience with the blood of Christ takes place in baptism. Peter writes, “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1Pet 3:21).<sup>43</sup> Baptism saves us because we can receive the answer of a good conscience toward God. This means that God grants us a good conscience in baptism by washing our sinful conscience with the blood of Christ and through the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, baptism is the crucial point in our conversion in which the blood of Christ cleanses our soul.

In the Gospel of John, the writer makes special mention of an extraordinary event that occurred on the cross after Jesus’ death:

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<sup>42</sup> See the commentary on Heb 10:19–23.

<sup>43</sup> See the commentary on 1Pet 3:18–22.

*Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. (Jn 19:32–35)<sup>44</sup>*

This took place to fulfill the Lord's words about the Passover lamb, that none of its bones shall be broken (Ex 12:46). It was also to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy that the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem would look on the LORD whom they have pierced (Zech 12:10). The piercing of Jesus' side and the immediate flow of blood and water proclaim that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, and that He is Lord and Savior.

The Lamb of God was pierced on the cross, and from His side came blood and water. This is the fountain of cleansing that washes away our sins. In other passages where water is brought into connection with the washing away of sins, the Scripture is speaking of baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Therefore, the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side provide the source of cleansing in baptism. When we are baptized, it is not mere immersion in water, but more importantly, the cleansing by the blood of the Lamb of God.

The Gospel records that the side (πλευρά) of Jesus was pierced. Genesis 2:22 in the LXX also uses the word for the side of Adam, from which God made Eve. From the side of the Lord Jesus the church is created just as from Adam's side Eve was created. By the shedding of His own blood on the cross, the Lord God redeemed His church (Acts 20:28). He also sanctifies and cleanses the church "with the washing of water by the word." (Eph 5:26).<sup>45</sup> Once again, as in Acts 2:38 and 22:16, water here is asso-

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44 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on John 19:31–37.

45 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Ephesians 5:25–27.

ciated with the effect of cleansing, referring to baptism. Christ Himself washes the church with the washing of water by the word, and the source of this cleansing is His atoning sacrifice on the cross for the church. In baptism, the blood that flowed from the side of Christ washes away the sins of the believer.

ii. The Holy Spirit

When the risen Lord gave His commission to the disciples, He also promised them the power to forgive and retain sins.

*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Jn 20:21–23)*

The Lord Jesus was speaking to the disciples collectively rather than individually. In other words, the mission to forgive and retain sins was given to the church. This is consistent with the Lord's words to Peter:

*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Mt 16:18, 19).*

The rock Jesus spoke of was Christ Himself, and the church that He builds on this rock is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven to bind and to loose. This power to loose and bind, according to the words of the Lord in John, comes from the Holy Spirit. The church would carry out this mission when the promised Holy Spirit comes. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Lord sends the church into the world to accomplish this work.

On the day of Pentecost, the Lord poured out His Holy Spirit on the disciples. On that very day, the apostles proclaimed salvation through Jesus Christ and baptized

the new believers in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. As we have seen when discussing the Lord's commission, the commission to forgive and retain sins parallels the commission to baptize. He who believes and is baptized will be saved because his sins are forgiven, but he who does not believe will be condemned because his sins remain. Having received the Holy Spirit, the church carried out the work of forgiveness of sins by baptizing new converts.

The presence of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is necessary for the baptism administered by the church to have the effect of washing away sins. Our spiritual rebirth is "out of water and Spirit" (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος; Jn 3:5). The water of baptism is inseparable from the presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is actively involved in baptism. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1Cor 12:13). We are washed, sanctified, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1Cor 6:11).<sup>46</sup> "By one Spirit," (ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι) could also be translated "in one Spirit." We are baptized either by the Spirit or in the Spirit when we receive baptism.<sup>47</sup>

The Holy Spirit is intimately connected with the blood of Christ. In reference to the blood of Christ and its cleansing effect, the writer of Hebrews states, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb 9:14). Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit. By the presence and power of the eternal Spirit, the blood offered by Christ can cleanse our conscience today.

The apostle John writes about the close relationship between the water, blood, and Spirit:

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<sup>46</sup> See the commentary on 1Cor 6:9–11.

<sup>47</sup> See the commentary on 1Cor 12:12–13.

*This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree. (1Jn 5:6-8; RSV)*

Jesus Christ came by water and blood, and the Spirit is the witness. This is not merely referring to the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh millenniums ago, but also to the ever present reality of Christ's saving works. His coming to us is with not only the water, but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness. Externally, the human eye only sees the water of baptism. But in the Spirit, we are washed in the blood of Christ when we are baptized. This was the testimony of the Gospel writer when he witnessed the miraculous flow of blood and water on the cross (Jn 19:34, 35). Not only so, the eternal Spirit also bears witness when the church carries out baptism. By the work of the Spirit, the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross washes away our sins today when we are baptized in water. Thus we have three unified witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood. This is the testimony of God, through which we may have eternal life in His Son (1Jn 5:9-12).<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, it is by the witnessing of the Holy Spirit that the cleansing power of Christ's blood is applied on the sinner in baptism. With this in mind, baptism is not to be carried out by any individual or organization apart from the church established by the Holy Spirit. Without the abidance and sending of the promised Holy Spirit, baptism would become a mere human act. This is why the early church began to witness for Christ and to baptize only after the Holy Spirit had come. Likewise, only the church established and sent by the Holy Spirit Himself can effectively complete the mission to forgive sins through baptism.

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48 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on 1Jn 5:5-13.



### C. THE NEW STATUS OF THE BAPTIZED THROUGH THE REMISSION OF SINS

In baptism the blood of Christ washes away our sins and we are buried with Christ into His death. This is the fundamental purpose and effect of baptism. Without the remission of sins, we remain strangers to the covenant of God. After our sins have been washed away, we enter into a new relationship with God. Therefore, the Scripture also speaks of baptism as affording a new status for the believer, and this newly acquired status is possible because our sins have been forgiven and removed. This new status also ushers in God's call to a new way of life in which every believer ought to walk by faith.

#### 1. Rebirth

Before we received the washing in the blood of Christ, we were dead in trespasses and sin. We walked in the lusts of our flesh according to the course of the world and the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:1–3; Col 2:13; 3:5–7; cf. Tit 3:3). After sin entered the world through Adam, death came to all men, for the wages of sins is death (Rom 5:12–14; 6:23). The death that results from sin is more than the physical death at the end of a person's earthly life. It is also separation from God and being under the dominion of sin (cf. Rom 8:6). A person who is still alive physically may be dead spiritually (cf. Mt 8:22; Lk 9:60). Sin reigns through death (Rom 5:21). Therefore, anyone who is subject to the rule of sin is spiritually dead, and this in fact applies to all men. The fact that all sinned shows that all are under the power of sin and death (Rom 5:12; cf. 1Jn 5:19).

God demonstrated His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). By Adam's offense many died, but the gift by the grace of Jesus Christ abounded to many (Rom 5:15). In Christ Jesus we may receive from God the gift of eternal life (Jn 3:16, 36; 6:40; Rom 6:23; 1Jn 5:11–13). When we are baptized into Christ, our old man is crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6). We are buried with Christ through baptism into death (Rom 6:3–4). The man that used to be the slave of sin and death dies. Through the cleansing power of

Christ's blood, we receive a new life in baptism. Paul writes about this spiritual resurrection:

*and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (Col 2:12–13)*

God raised us with Christ in baptism, having forgiven us all our trespasses. The remission of sins is the precondition for a new life together with Christ. Sin resulted in death, and thus our sins must be forgiven for us to be raised to life. In baptism, our sins are washed away and the sinful man dies. Having forgiven our trespass on account of the abounding grace of Christ, God also grants us a new life by raising us with Christ. For this reason, baptism is a “washing of regeneration,” as Paul states:

*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Tit 3:5)<sup>49</sup>*

“Regeneration” means coming back to life or being born again. This new spiritual life from God occurs by means of washing. As we have seen, the washing away of sins takes place in baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Through this washing, we are brought back to life. Our Lord Jesus spoke about this rebirth in His discourse with Nicodemus:

*Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from*

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49 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Tit 3:4–7.

*and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (Jn 3:3–8)<sup>50</sup>*

One who is dead spiritually cannot enter the kingdom of God. We must be born again spiritually, i.e., be born from above. This rebirth is the work of God. However, it is not something completely detached from the tangible realm, for Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about “earthly things” (Jn 3:12). Just as God sent His Son into the world so we may believe in Him and have eternal life, the spiritual birth from God is also given to us in a way that we may receive and experience. Hence, this spiritual birth is a birth “out of water and Spirit” (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος). With the work of the Holy Spirit, a person is born from above when he is baptized in water.

Receiving a new life from God demands a new attitude and way of life. Paul points out how irreconcilable it is for a baptized believer to live in sin:

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:1–4)*

Having been buried with Christ into His death and raised to a new life, we have died to sin and are no longer obligated to live under its dominion. Therefore, Paul continues, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:11).

When we were dead in our trespasses and sin, we were slaves to sin. But now that we have been set free from sin through baptism, we become slaves of righteousness and of God. We are not to let sin reign in our mortal body or obey our sinful lusts. Instead, we ought to present ourselves to God as being alive from the dead and our members as instruments of righteousness to God. Christ has bought us with His precious blood. As such, we are no longer our own. We are to dedicate our bodies

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50 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Jn 3:1–15.

for God's glory, and should live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died for us and rose again (Rom 6:12, 13; 1Cor 6:20; 2Cor 5:14, 15). Paul declares, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). This should be the attitude of the believer whose sinful man has died and who has been raised to life.

Hebrews also urges us to live a God-centered life after we have been cleansed:

*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:19-25)*

Whereas we were once far from God, we may now draw near to God because we have been purified by the blood of Christ. The new life we live now is in the very presence of God. Therefore it must be steadfastly oriented to God's will, manifesting itself in love and good works.

## 2. Sanctification and justification

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul admonished them about unrighteous deeds:

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were*

*justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”(1Cor 6:9–11)<sup>51</sup>*

Although some of them used to indulge in unrighteous living, Paul reminds them that they have now acquired a completely new status. He uses “but” three times to emphasize the contrast between the old way of life and the new: “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified.”

Washing is for the purpose of removal of filth. Spiritually, it is cleansing from sin (Prov 30:12; Ps 51:7; Isa 1:16; Jer 4:14). As we have seen in the Old Testament foreshadow, God promised to provide cleansing for His people and wash away their sins (Isa 4:4; Ezek 36:25; Zech 13:1). This is fulfilled in Christ, who washes us from our sins in His own blood (Rev 1:5).

To sanctify is literally “to make holy.” Sanctification is a divine act that separates the holy from the common or profane. The assembly of Israel, the priests, as well as the sanctuary were sanctified unto the Lord (Ex 19:14; 28:41; 29:43; 31:13; Lev 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32). In the new covenant, Christ sanctifies the people of God by His atoning blood (Jn 17:19; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Eph 5:26; Heb 2:11; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12).

Justification means reckoning as righteous or acquittal. To be justified by God, therefore, means to be reckoned by God as righteous. Believers in Christ are justified through faith on account of the blood of Christ (Acts 13:39; Rom 3:24–26, 30; 5:1, 9; Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24). The justified is delivered from his sins (Acts 13:38, 39; Rom 6:7; “freed” is the same word in Greek as the word for “justified”), and is free from condemnation (Rom 8:33).

We can see a commonality in these three acts of God. The believer is washed, sanctified, and justified by the blood of Christ. We have studied that the spiritual washing away of sins is connected with baptism (Acts 22:16). Sanctification, too, is effected through baptism, as Paul states, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing

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51 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on 1Cor 6:9–11.

of water by the word,” (Eph 5:25, 26).<sup>52</sup> In Romans 6:3–7 we also learn that the old man is crucified in baptism, and we are thereby freed (justified) from sin. In light of these teachings, we understand that in 1Cor 6:11 Paul is alluding to the work of God on the believers in their baptism. Because our sins are washed away in baptism, we stand before God sanctified and justified.

As Paul exhorted the Corinthians, believers who were washed, sanctified, and justified have no part in unrighteousness.

Believers in Christ who have been sanctified need to continually live in sanctification by keeping ourselves holy (Eph 4:24; 1Thess 4:3–7; 1Pet 1:15, 16). This life-long endeavor is to be carried out through the gracious help of God, for it is God who can sanctify us completely (1Thess 5:23; Heb 10:14). In like manner, we are to also put our faith to work in our daily lives so we may be justified before God. We have been justified freely by faith through the blood of Christ in baptism. The faith we had in the beginning must work together with our works, so that our faith is made perfect by our works (Jas 2:20–26). Paul tells us, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2Cor 5:10). If we hold fast to the faith we had in the beginning by continually doing what pleases our Lord from our heart, we will receive praise from the Lord on the day of judgment (cf. 1Cor 4:4, 5).

### 3. Putting on of Christ

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26–29)<sup>53</sup>*

Paul explains to the Galatians that the result of their baptism into Christ is that they have put on Christ. Whereas they were

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<sup>52</sup> See the commentary on Ephesians 5:25–27.

<sup>53</sup> See the commentary on Gal 3:26–29.

once kept under guard by the law, they have now become sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:23–25). This change of status occurs in baptism, through which believers put on Christ.

To understand the meaning of putting on Christ, we may first take note of the parallel expressions in this passage: “In Christ Jesus” and “Christ’s.” To put on Christ means to be in Christ Jesus and to be Christ’s.

God’s saving grace is found in Christ, for He is Lord and Savior who has accomplished God’s plan of salvation for mankind. God’s redemption and gift of eternal life are in Christ (Rom 3:24; 6:23; Eph 1:7). God calls believers in Christ, gives them grace in Christ, creates them in Christ, circumcises them in Christ, forgives them in Christ, sanctifies them in Christ, and blesses them with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1Cor 1:2; Eph 1:3, 4; 2:20; 4:32; Php 3:14; Col 2:11; 2Tim 1:9). One day all believers will also be made alive in Christ (1Cor 15:22). Therefore, being in Christ is essential to participation in God’s saving grace. That is why the New Testament frequently addresses believers as those who are in Christ Jesus.

According to Rom 6:3 and Gal 3:27, believers are baptized into Christ. In other words, we obtain the status of “being in Christ” through baptism. In baptism we enter into a union with Christ, being crucified with Christ, buried together with Christ into His death, and raised together with Christ (Rom 6:4, 8; Col 2:11–13). Christ becomes our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1Cor 1:30). We put on Christ like a garment, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2Cor 5:21; Php 3:9). Having died to sin in baptism, we are alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:11). As such, when God looks upon us, He no longer sees the sinful man but the righteousness of Christ.

Having been baptized into Christ, we become Christ’s (1Cor 3:23; 7:22; 15:23; 2Cor 10:7; Gal 3:29; 5:24). In view of this, we can have a fuller appreciation of why believers are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and call on the name of the Lord in baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; 1Cor 6:11).

On the one hand, baptism in the name of Christ connotes that the baptism is carried out in His authority. On the other hand, it indicates that the baptized comes under the name of Christ, becomes Christ's, and is united with Christ. Through baptism, the baptized acknowledges Jesus Christ as His Lord and surrenders himself to Him.

Putting on Christ is furthermore a collective act. According to Galatians 3:27, 28, having put on Christ through baptism means that all believers are one in Christ Jesus. They share a common status of being Christ's, and thereby join with one another as one body. In Christ Jesus a person's race or gender is of no relevance to their spiritual status. Thus, through baptism, we are brought into the body of Christ and become members thereof (1Cor 12:13; cf. Acts 2:41).

In short, the putting on of Christ as a result of baptism encompasses several meanings. Through baptism, we are cloaked with the righteousness of Christ, we belong to Christ, and we become members of Christ's body. All in all, we obtain an identity that is inseparable from Christ.

On an individual level, each believer is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ in his life. Paul exhorts the Romans, "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom 13:13, 14). Our old man having died in baptism, we are to put on the new man, which has the likeness of God (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). It is imperative for us to keep the garment of righteousness and holiness that we had put on in baptism and imitate Christ in our conduct. The Lord Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (Rev 16:15). This is an admonition to all believers, to continually put on and keep the garments received in baptism until the Lord comes.



#### 4. Sons of God

Paul's overall point in Gal 3:26–29 is that we are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This is the status of believers who have been baptized into Christ. Once strangers to the covenant of God, we now become sons. This new status as sons is the result of being Christ's. Paul explains that God's promise to Abraham in fact rested in Christ (Gal 3:16, 17). Only through faith in Jesus Christ can we receive the promise. When we are baptized through faith into Christ, we become Christ's. Consequently, we become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

The promise to Abraham the Scripture speaks of is the heavenly inheritance (Heb 11:10, 16). To be heirs according to the promise means being the heirs of God's eternal kingdom (Heb 12:28; Jas 2:5). A glorious hope awaits us who are sons of God. God is leading His sons into glory, which will be revealed one day. We look forward to the final adoption, the redemption of our bodies and the liberty of the sons of God (Rom 8:18–23; Heb 2:10). We will put off the corruptible and be clothed with immortality (1Cor 15:50–54; 2Cor 5:1–5). This glorious promise is already given in baptism. "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom 6:5). In dying together with Christ we receive the hope of being resurrected in Christ's likeness.

To those who believe in the Lord Jesus and are baptized in His name for the remission of sins God also gives the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 39), who is the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance (2Cor 5:5; Eph 1:13, 14). The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are sons and heirs (Rom 8:15, 16; Gal 4:6, 7).

The glorious status of being sons of God requires us to live a new life. With the Holy Spirit in us as the seal of our inheritance, we are to walk in the Spirit and not according to the flesh (Gal 5:16, 25). A trait of the sons of God is that they are led by the Spirit of God (Rom 8:14). The children of God practice righteousness and love (1Jn 3:10). They are blameless

and harmless, shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Php 2:15). Instead of yielding to sin to live under its dominion, we can reign in life (Rom 5:17). As children of God, we know that when Christ is revealed, we will be like Him. With this hope we must purify ourselves just as He is pure (1Jn 3:2, 3). Although hardships will be in the way, we know that these forms of disciplines are in fact appropriate for the sons of God, and we need to endure these sufferings to partake in God's holiness (Heb 12:1–12). The sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom 8:18). With this hope in us and through Him who loves us, we can be more than conquerors (Rom 8:37).

#### **D. BAPTISM AND SALVATION**

We have discussed at great length the spiritual effect of baptism and the new status of the baptized. In baptism, our old man is crucified and buried with Christ into His death, and the blood of Christ washes our sins away. Consequently, we are raised to a new life, sanctified, and justified. Christ clothes us with His righteousness, makes us His possession, unites us all as one in His body, and designates us as sons and heirs. All of these spiritual blessings in Christ begin with baptism.

With such abundant testimony of the Scripture on God's grace in baptism, it should be clear to us that God saves the believer through baptism. Anyone who wishes to see the truth in God's word on baptism ought to carefully study all of the related passages with an open mind. In this section, we shall examine the words of Christ and the view of the New Testament church concerning the place of baptism in the believer's salvation.

##### **1. The Lord's promise of salvation**

In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15, 16).<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup> See the commentary on Mk 16:14–18.

response to the good news of salvation encompasses belief and acceptance of baptism, and the result is salvation. In other words, Christ offered the promise of salvation to everyone who believes the gospel and is baptized. The Lord placed receiving baptism in a direct relationship to one's salvation.

It is frequently mentioned that, in the second part of verse 16, condemnation does not result from failure to be baptized. This seems to suggest that baptism does not determine a person's salvation or condemnation. However, the omission of baptism indicates how believing and being baptized are integrally related. Baptism presupposes belief, and without belief there is no baptism to speak of. On the other hand, true belief is followed by baptism. There are only two kinds of response to the gospel according to the Lord, i.e., believing and being baptized versus not believing. Therefore, baptism cannot be separated from belief. No true believer refuses to be baptized or dismisses the need for baptism.

Since baptism and belief go hand in hand, baptism alone does not determine a person's salvation; it needs to be accompanied with belief. On the other hand, baptism is necessary for salvation precisely because it is linked intimately with one's belief. Furthermore, the fact that the Lord offers the promise of salvation to those who believe and are baptized establishes a definite connection between baptism and salvation. Christ Himself appointed baptism as a necessary step in the way of salvation.

## 2. Entering into the kingdom of God

The Lord Jesus spoke in the most definite terms about the necessity of spiritual birth for salvation in His discourse with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1–15).<sup>55</sup> To enter the kingdom of God, one must be born from above. Entering the kingdom of God denotes being saved, for entering God's kingdom is synonymous with salvation (cf. Mt 19:23–25). The new birth that is required for salvation is a spiritual birth and the work of the Spirit. More specifically, it is being born of water and Spirit (Jn 3:5).

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55 See the commentary on Jn 3:1–15.

Unless a person is born this way, he is outside the kingdom of God and the grace of salvation.

Because of its crucial relationship to salvation, it behooves us to understand the meaning of being born of water and Spirit. The word “water” stands out in the passage because it is the only tangible element in the passage that is a necessary part of the spiritual birth. While Jesus did not explicitly state what the water He spoke of represented, the first readers of the New Testament would have understood that it is the water in baptism because baptism was administered to all Christians. Nevertheless, we still have the aid of other parallel passages.

In the passage immediately following Jesus’ discourse, the word “water” is found in connection with baptism (Jn 3:22, 23). Hence, it would not be inappropriate for the reader to also link Jesus’ mention of “water” to the water of baptism. 1 Peter 3:20, 21 speaks of water and salvation when discussing baptism. In Acts 10:47, 48, when Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water?” there is no doubt that he was referring to baptism, for he continued, “that these should not be baptized?” The Gentile converts must not be forbidden from being baptized in water.

Another passage in the Bible that speaks of birth and salvation is Titus 3:4, 5. God saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual rebirth is by means of a washing. According to Acts 22:16, the washing away of sins occurs when a believer is baptized. Therefore, the washing of regeneration takes place in baptism, and that, along with the renewing of the Holy Spirit, is the means through which God saves us. Ephesians 5:25, 26 tells us that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word. Here, the washing of the church by Christ is for the purpose of sanctification and cleansing, and it involves the use of water. As we have discussed previously, sanctification and cleansing are achieved by the blood of Jesus Christ, and this gracious working of God happens in baptism. Thus, we can see that “washing” and “water” allude to the effect and element

of baptism. The birth out of water and Spirit, therefore, is accomplished in baptism.

Water alone does not bring about the spiritual birth that is necessary for salvation. Rather, it is accompanied by the Spirit. The spiritual birth consists of both the tangible and the intangible dimensions. Through the witness and authority of the eternal Spirit of God, the blood of Christ washes the sinner when he is baptized with water. Consequently, his old man dies with Christ and he is raised to a new life with Christ. For this reason, baptism is the process through which the believer is “born of water and Spirit,” and it is necessary for salvation.

### 3. Baptism saves

The relationship between baptism and salvation is put in the most explicit terms in 1Peter 3:18–22.<sup>56</sup> Peter places a type and an antitype side by side. The type is the salvation of Noah and his family through water, and the antitype is the salvation of believers through baptism.

Whereas we would usually think of the salvation of Noah as salvation from the flood water, the Scripture teaches that he was saved through the water. In other words, water was the instrument through which God saved Noah and his household. This event in the Old Testament foreshadowed our salvation today. In what ways was Noah’s salvation a parallel to a Christian’s salvation? Just as Noah was saved through water then, we are saved through baptism now. Water is the common element in both scenarios.

However, baptism is not a mere immersion with water. Baptism saves us not because of the cleansing nature of water: “Not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1Pet 3:21). The saving effect of baptism lies in the washing of the conscience. This is done by the blood of Christ (Heb 9:14), which washes us during baptism. It is for this reason that the Scripture teaches that baptism saves.

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56 See the commentary on 1Pet 3:18–22.

The passage in 1 Peter also states that baptism saves us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection made possible the remission of sins. Having obtained eternal redemption, Christ entered heaven with His own blood to appear in the presence of God for us. Because of His resurrection, His blood can now cleanse our conscience (Heb 9:11, 12, 14). Furthermore, when we are baptized into Christ, we are also raised with Him (Col 2:12). We are given a new life. As such, by the resurrection of Christ we are able to receive the saving grace granted to us through baptism.

#### 4. Events in Acts

We now turn our attention to the events in Acts that confirm the necessity of baptism for salvation. The urgency with which baptism was commanded and received in the conversion narratives indicates that baptism is integral to one's salvation.

When the multitudes in Jerusalem who gathered at the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit had heard the apostles' message that Jesus is Lord and Christ, they were cut to the heart. They asked the apostles, "What shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:37-39). That very day three thousand received the word gladly and were baptized (Acts 2:41). The question, "What shall we do?" pertained to salvation, for Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel in which the eschatological event of the pouring out of the Spirit would also be the time of salvation: "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). The multitudes who heard the apostles' message eagerly wanted to know what they must do to be saved in light of the fact that Jesus, whom they had crucified, is Lord and Christ. Peter's response indicated that salvation hinges on the remission of sins, which is granted through repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. To call on the name of the LORD, therefore, is more than verbal confession, but entails baptism into the Lord's name for the remission of sins. To repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is the crucial initial step to salvation.

When the angel of God spoke to Cornelius, he instructed him to seek out Peter, saying, “He will tell you what you must do” (Acts 10:6). According to Peter’s account later, the angel had told Cornelius that Peter would tell him “words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). Peter’s message of salvation centered on the risen Lord and the remission of sins through belief in His name (Acts 10:36–43). The Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the word even while Peter was still speaking. At the sight of God’s clear election of these Gentiles, Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Baptism was so closely connected with Peter’s message of salvation and remission of sins. It was also so integral to the converts’ acceptance of Christ by faith that the Scripture did not even state explicitly that they believed in the Lord Jesus; their baptism sufficiently testified to their belief. Thus we can see that baptism must be administered and received hand in hand with the preaching and acceptance of the gospel of salvation. As much as they had received the promised Holy Spirit as a seal of God’s election, they still needed to receive the remission of sins through baptism. While Peter’s preaching about believing in Christ fulfilled the words of the angel to Cornelius concerning “what you must do,” Peter’s command for them to be baptized completed this fulfillment. Cornelius and his household must believe in the Lord Jesus and be baptized in His name to be saved.

The close connection between the message of salvation and baptism is also seen in the conversion of the jailer of Philippi. Witnessing the great earthquake and seeing the unexpected preservation of his own life, the jailer fell down trembling before the apostles, saying, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:25–30). They told him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). After speaking to him and all those who were in his house the word of the Lord, immediately he and all his family were baptized (Acts 16:33). The Scripture comments that the jailer “rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” (Acts 16:34). Once again we observe how baptism was inseparable from the word of salvation. Believing in the Lord

encompasses and is signaled by being baptized, and baptism is the way through which the believer enters and accepts the saving grace of the Lord.

#### **E. ADMINISTRATION OF BAPTISM**

##### **1. The baptist**

From the New Testament records of baptisms administered in the apostolic church and from the teachings on baptism, we observe that the Scripture does not focus on the role of the baptist. We have numerous accounts in Acts that converts were baptized. In the epistles the writers also remind the Christians of their baptism into Christ. But the focus is never on who it was that administered the baptism.

For one, baptism is a heavenly institution, and its effects are the work of God. The baptist is but a human agent carrying out the command of the risen Lord. It is God who washes away our sins, buries us together with Christ into His death, raises us to life, sanctifies, and justifies. It is by the Spirit that we are baptized into one body and made one in Christ. The spiritual power through baptism is never the merit of the baptist.

Secondly, through baptism the believer enters into a union with Christ directly and comes under His name. Paul asked the Corinthians rhetorically, “Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” and thanked God that He did not baptize most of them lest anyone should say that Paul had baptized in his own name (1Cor 1:13–15). The name of the baptist has no significance whatsoever in the salvation of the baptized. The believer is baptized in Christ’s name alone, and his relationship with the Lord is apart from the baptist who carries out the baptism.

Thirdly, the baptist does not baptize on his own authority. Instead, he is sent by the Lord through the church to carry out this commission. The Lord gave the promise of the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive and to retain sins to all disciples collectively rather than to a privileged few. Furthermore, baptism is carried out under the direction and testimony of the Holy Spirit rather than the will of the baptist.



Lastly, baptism is the affair of the church, since the believer is baptized into the body of Christ and becomes a member thereof. According to Ephesians 5:26, Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church with the water by the word. From this perspective, the washing of individual believers makes up the washing of the church as a whole. Thus, every baptism involves the church, and it is an act of Christ for the church.

In view of the last two reasons stated above, no baptism should be carried out apart from the church. Speaking of the unity of the church, Paul writes, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4–6). In God’s eyes, there is but one baptism. All believers of the one body of Christ receive this one baptism. No baptism that is disassociated from the church can be legitimate. This being the case, the baptist needs first of all to be a member of the body of Christ and identifies with it. A person whose sins have not been washed by the blood of Christ and who is a stranger to the house of God is by no means qualified to administer baptism.

Since baptism rests on the authority given by the Spirit to the church, it is also necessary that the baptist is sent by the Holy Spirit and by the church. The baptist himself must have received the promised Holy Spirit and represent the church of God, which is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. An individual or organization without the presence and delegation of the Holy Spirit, even if they confess the name of Christ, is unable to carry out the commission to preach and baptize for the remission of sins. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, no baptism can effectively wash away sins and incorporate a person into Christ’s body.

Turning our attention to the Scripture, we may take note of the way in which the disciples were sent to baptize. They were members of Christ’s kingdom and among the first members of the church (Lk 22:28–30; cf. Acts 2:41,47). In the account of the footwashing, the Gospel tells us that the disciples were Christ’s very own (Jn 13:1). They had a part with the Lord Jesus

and were completely clean (Jn 13:8,10). Having received the promise of the Holy Spirit, they waited in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of the promise (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–8, 12–14). It was not until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost that the church began to administer the baptism in the new covenant. Throughout Acts, we continue to observe how the missions of the evangelists and apostles, including the baptisms they carried out wherever there were converts, were under the direction of the Holy Spirit and delegation of the church.

## 2. The baptismal candidate

What does the Scripture require of the person receiving baptism? From the teachings of the Scripture, we learn that baptism is to be received under certain conditions, and demands are also laid upon the one to be baptized.

### a. Believe

The reception of baptism is the response of one's belief in the Lord. Paul and Silas told the jailer in Philippi to believe in the Lord for salvation. After hearing the word of the Lord, he believed in God with all his household. Immediately, he and all his family were baptized that very night (Acts 16:31–34). Many Corinthians, including Crispus and his household, heard the word, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8). The Lord Jesus states in His commission, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16). Baptism presupposes belief, and without belief there is no baptism to speak of. In fact, condemnation awaits the unbeliever. Baptism is not to be administered to one who does not believe. Faith underlies a person's conversion, and is the channel through which God's grace and the cleansing of Jesus' blood comes upon the believer. He who is baptized must believe in the Lord Jesus and heed the message of the gospel. This embodies not only an acknowledgement of the name of Christ, but also the acceptance of the way of

salvation according to God's word and as taught by Christ's church.<sup>57</sup>

b. Repent

Since the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the call to repentance and baptism were inseparable. The coming of the kingdom of heaven demanded a total turning of one's heart and life toward God. The multitudes came to John the Baptist to be baptized, confessing their sins, and John taught them to live by God's law of justice and mercy.

The Lord Jesus also preached repentance (Mt 4:17). In His commission to the disciples, repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ are tied together as the message they were to bring to the world (Lk 24:47). True to the commission, Peter told the converts on the Day of Pentecost, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). The call to repentance continued to ring through the preaching of the apostles wherever they went (Acts 3:19; 5:31; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

Repentance goes beyond the confession of sins at baptism. Repentance, by definition, is the turning of one's entire being. This re-orientation begins at baptism and commits the believer to God once for all. Baptism is in fact the decisive divine act through which the new man is created to live in God's likeness. Therefore, when exhorting the believers concerning their obligation to walk in newness of life, Paul begins with the doctrine of baptism (Rom 6:1–23). In baptism the believer dies to sin and is buried with Christ into death. The goal is that the body of sin might be done away with, that the believer should no longer be a slave of sin. Through God's power the believer is set free from sin's bondage. He becomes a slave of righteousness. This is a decisive change of status, which calls for a new way of living. He who is baptized into Christ is dead to sin but alive

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<sup>57</sup> Refer to Chapter 8, "Baptism, Grace, and Faith," for a detailed discussion on baptism and faith.

to God in the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, throughout the New Testament, the Scriptures admonish, exhort, and warn believers to live a life worthy of their calling, to live not as the world does, but walk in the light through the renewing power of the Spirit.

### 3. Mode of baptism

By the mode of baptism we mean its method and form. How is baptism to be administered according to the Scripture? Through the centuries, there have been many ways of baptism among the different denominations and Christian groups. Some insist that baptism must be done in a certain prescribed manner for salvation. Many others regard this matter as having no relevance.

The Scripture does not explicitly command us to administer baptism in a certain way or to receive it according to a prescribed form. Neither does it explicitly demand a precise adherence to a particular mode for salvation. It may thus appear that as long as baptism is administered and received, how it is done is unimportant.

Nevertheless, baptism cannot be detached from its mode. The very word “baptize” entails an action of some type. Other actions would not be considered baptism. Without any method or form, there is no baptism to speak of. When the Scripture records that a believer is baptized, or reminds the believer of his baptism, it implies that there is this certain set of actions and settings that is called baptism. As such, it is not possible to avoid a definition of baptism, as much as one may wish to minimize its importance. Baptism itself requires a mode. Hence, it is not only important, but also necessary, for us to define it in terms of its proper administration.

The New Testament writings leave us no step-by-step instruction on how to baptize. The early church did not face the problem of diverse forms of baptism because she had witnessed its administration by the Lord and the apostles, with the baptism of John the Baptist as the predecessor. If John the Baptist was the first to administer baptism in history, without

any precedence that would qualify as what the Scripture terms “baptism,” he must have received instructions on it directly from heaven (cf. Mt 21:25; Mk 11:30; Lk 20:4).

Many centuries later today, without firsthand witness of how baptism was administered then, the church is faced with the task of being true to the biblical baptism. Despite many interpretations on the definition of baptism and various forms of practice, we are not to make choices based on personal preference or accept all manners of administration as legitimate baptism. Since the church is established by the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit, the church must receive from the Lord Himself, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, instructions on baptism. There is only one body and one Spirit. This one body of Christ believes in the one Lord, shares one faith, and administers one baptism (Eph 4:4, 5). It behooves the church today to know the essential elements that constitute biblical baptism. It is the task of the church to bring all believers into the church through one baptism. As such, defining the proper mode of baptism is not left to the personal interpretation or preference of individuals.

The True Jesus Church proclaims to be the one and only church of salvation because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in these last days and she has been entrusted with the complete gospel of salvation.<sup>58</sup> Being the one body of Christ, the True Jesus Church returns to the earliest way of baptism through the direct instruction of the Lord Jesus and remains faithful to the examples and teachings of the apostles as found in the Scripture. We shall now examine the Scriptures to discuss what constitutes the proper administration of baptism. As we do so, it is also important to bear in mind that the effect of baptism is not only in following the outward form of baptism. Baptism is entrusted to the church and is effective because of the authority given the Holy Spirit and the gospel of salvation that she preaches. Spiritually speaking, it is Christ Himself who sanctifies and cleanses the church with the washing of

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<sup>58</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss at length the doctrine of the church. For a more in-depth study of this subject, refer to the publications of the True Jesus Church that address this doctrine.

water by the word (Eph 5:25, 26). Since there is such a deep connection between church and baptism, baptisms administered apart from the church of God and without the testimony of the Holy Spirit would be ineffective for salvation, even if they conform to the external characteristics of biblical baptism.

a. Living water

The New Testament sacrament of baptism for the remission of sins invariably involves water. The clear precedence in the Scripture indicates that baptisms were administered in natural running water. John the Baptist baptized the multitudes in the Jordan River (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5; Jn 1:28; 10:40). This is where the Lord Jesus Christ received John's baptism (Mt 3:13; Mk 1:9). We are told that John also baptized in Aenon near Salim "because there was much water there" (Jn 3:23). As such, the choice of location to administer baptism was based on the supply of a natural source of flowing water. When Philip was preaching Jesus Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch as they were traveling along the desert road, they came to some water. At the eunuch's request, they went down into the water and Philip baptized him (Acts 8:36–39). Although the Scripture does not record whether the water was flowing, we know at least in this case that it was a natural body of water.

We find no narrative in the Bible where baptism was carried out in a man-made container, nor are there any directives for us to do so. As we have studied in the section on the spiritual characteristics of baptism, the LORD speaks of himself as the fountain of living water in contrast to the other gods, who are broken cisterns (Jer 2:13). When depicting the divine source of cleansing and life, the Scripture also uses fountains of living water as the metaphor (Zec 13:1; 14:8; Jn 7:38; Rev 21:6; cf. Rev 22:17).<sup>59</sup> Never does the Scripture describe God or His grace as a man-made pool.

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<sup>59</sup> Living water is also translated as "running water" in the laws regarding purification, denoting its flowing nature.

In the absence of any reference to baptism in an artificial supply of water and in light of Biblical examples, we ought not to baptize in pools or other man-made reservoirs. To remain true to the Scripture, the church today should baptize in natural forms of living water.

b. Immersion

We have seen that the word “baptize” (βαπτίζω) means “immerse,” “dip,” or “sink.” To baptize a person literally means to immerse him. This definition of the word, however, is not uncontested. Some have pointed out that the meaning of βαπτίζω in Mk 7:3, 4 and Lk 11:38 cannot be immersion. But this is not definitive.<sup>60</sup> Paul’s metaphorical usage of βαπτίζω in 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2 can help us understand what the action of “baptize” involves:

*Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (1Cor 10:1, 2)*

The Israelites were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea by being under the cloud and passing through the sea. In other words, they were completely enveloped by the cloud above them and the sea around them. In this sense, when the people came out to John the Baptist to be baptized by him in the Jordan (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5), they were submerged in the river.

Mark uses the preposition “into” (εἰς) when describing Jesus’ baptism by John. “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan” (Mk 1:9). “In the Jordan” is “into the Jordan” in Greek. While the preposition εἰς does not always denote movement into something, that is the most common meaning. That Jesus Christ was baptized into Jordan indicates that He was immersed.

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<sup>60</sup> “The washing in this case is not merely of the hands, but apparently involves immersion of the whole person (cf. Tob. 7:8 for bathing as well as hand washing before eating, though this one instance does not prove that immersion was the norm before all meals).” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 282.

When Philip baptized the eunuch, they first went down into the water. After the baptism, they came up out of the water. “Went down into” (κατέβησαν εἰς) and “came up out of” (ἀνέβησαν ἐκ) refer to stepping into and out of the water. This detailed description favors immersion as the form of baptism, for only immersion requires both the baptist and the baptized to go down into the water. Other forms such as sprinkling or ablution could have been performed on dry ground.

Paul’s discussion of the spiritual dimension of baptism also supports immersion as the form of baptism. The believer who is baptized into Christ Jesus is baptized into His death. Being baptized into His death, according to Paul, means being buried with Him into death, and this occurs through baptism (Rom 6:3, 4; cf. Col 2:12). “Baptized” and “buried” are used synonymously here as metaphors to depict the spiritual event that takes place when we are incorporated into the death of Christ. Paul finds in baptism the unity of the outward action and the inward action. When the believer is immersed outwardly, he is also immersed inwardly with Christ into His death. Immersion, rather than any other form, best suits the metaphorical language of burial.

c. Bowing of head

In the baptismal passage of Romans 6, Paul also writes, “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5).<sup>61</sup> Baptism into Christ Jesus is baptism into His death. This baptism into Christ’s death is a union with Him in the likeness of His death. “Likeness” (ὁμοίωμα) means a copy of an object. Our death to sin in baptism is a copy of the death of Christ.

But the likeness is not only a spiritual likeness, for the likeness of the death and resurrection of Christ was not without any bodily form. ὁμοίωμα in the New Testament often denotes a physical representation. Since baptism

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61 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Rom 6:1–10.



consists of both the inward and outward dimensions, it has an outward form as well as an inward effect. Just as the believer is united in the likeness of Christ's death inwardly in baptism, he also shares in the likeness of Christ's death outwardly when he is baptized.

The Scripture does describe clearly and concretely the form of Christ's death. In fact, this is the only description of the physical likeness of Christ's death that we are given. According to John 19:30, "And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." "Having bowed" (κλίνας) is an aorist participle, indicating that it is an action prior to the action of the leading verb, "He gave over" (παρέδωκεν). So we may translate the verse as, "After He had bowed His head, He gave up His spirit." The form of Jesus' death was not the natural result of death, but the deliberate final act of Jesus on the cross before he gave up His spirit. The likeness of His death becomes the prototype for us in baptism. When we are baptized, we should also bow our heads as our Lord did on the cross.

The outward form of baptism has a symbolic function. It is not arbitrary. If the inward effect of baptism is the union with Christ in the likeness of His death, the outward form should likewise conform to the likeness of Christ's death, especially if the Scripture has depicted what that physical likeness is. We have also noted the symbolic meaning of the bowing of head in the Scripture. It represents the humility of the sinner under the weight of sin as well as his complete surrender to God. This symbolic action coincides with our death to sin and new life to God. As such, the outward form of bowing of head in baptism fulfills its symbolic purpose, portraying the inner spiritual reality of uniting with Christ in His death.

d. In the name of Jesus Christ

Jesus' commission to the disciples consisted of the command to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). In view of their contexts and the later practice of the apostles, we understand that

these words were not intended to be recited as a baptismal formula. Rather, they are an indication of the nature of the name of Jesus.<sup>62</sup> To act “in the name of” means “to claim the authority of.”<sup>63</sup> The command to baptize, as stated by Jesus, is founded on the universal authority given to Him (Mt 28:18). The name of Jesus was not only the name of the incarnate Son, but also of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. It is with this all-powerful name that the church is to baptize, and those who are baptized surrender themselves to this name.

After receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles understood that the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is in fact the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, throughout the narratives in Acts, the apostles consistently baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:37, 38; 8:14–16; 10:47, 48; 19:4, 5). It is in the name of the Lord Jesus we are washed in baptism, and it is upon His name that we call during baptism (cf. Acts 22:16; 1Cor 6:11). Thus, the name of the Lord Jesus is central to the New Testament baptism.

While “in the name of” encompasses the general meaning of appealing to the authority represented by the name, it also includes invoking the name. In this sense, the apostles must have pronounced the name of the Lord Jesus when they baptized as well as preached about the Lord Jesus before administering baptism.

This is evident in the account of the baptism of the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7).<sup>64</sup> Paul baptized these disciples even though they had already been baptized into John’s baptism. They had certainly heard John’s preaching about the Christ, and the fact that they were called disciples indicates that they were followers of the Lord Jesus. But this was not enough; they still needed to be baptized again. Paul did not

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62 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Mt 28:16–20.

63 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 5:271.

64 See the more detailed explanation in the commentary on Acts 19:1–7.

simply educate them about the distinction between John's baptism and baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, but actually baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. This tells us that the new baptism was distinct from the baptism they had previously received not only in meaning but also in practice. The name of the Lord Jesus was invoked during baptism.

In James 2:7 we have a reference to "the noble name by which you were called." "By which you were called" is literally "the one having been called upon you." The NRSV has "the excellent name that was invoked over you." This expression suggests that in the early church, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was invoked over the believer when he was baptized into Christ.

Along with the emphasis on the invocation of the name of the Lord Jesus in the administration of baptism, we also need to bear in mind the importance of instructions about the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is to be received and administered with faith in the Lord Jesus. It is the responsibility of the church, therefore, to preach and teach the name of Jesus Christ to all disciples while baptizing in His name.

# Chapter 8

## BAPTISM, GRACE, AND FAITH

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*  
(Eph 2:4–9)

Our salvation is rooted solely in the mercy and grace of God, which He imparted to us through faith. No work of righteousness on our part merits this gift of salvation. Among the strongest polemics in Paul's writings is his staunch insistence on salvation apart from works. He demonstrates that while the law is spiritual, no flesh can be justified in the sight of God by the deeds of the law. Instead, the righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. We are justified apart from the deeds of the law, but freely by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:19–28). Through the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ with His blood, we can have access into God's grace.

Paul views grace and works as diametric, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom 11:6). He likewise contrasts faith and work, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is

accounted for righteousness” (Rom 4:4, 5). He goes as far as declaring that any attempt to be justified by works is a total denial of God’s grace, “And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal 5:3, 4).

In view of the fundamental doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, how are we to understand the place of baptism?

One of the chief objections to the belief in the necessity of baptism for salvation is that baptism is of works, and as such cannot be a condition for salvation. It is argued that assigning any saving effect to a rite such as baptism discredits and nullifies the finished work of Christ on the cross. If this understanding of baptism stands, then teaching salvation through baptism would be dangerously close to requiring circumcision for salvation, a position the apostle Paul vehemently rejects.

Those who deny the saving effects of baptism tend to speak of baptism primarily as something that man does. This, however, is not the perspective of the Scriptures. As we have noted, the passages that present the doctrine of New Testament baptism hardly mention the baptist. Similarly, the act of being baptized on the part of the believer is never viewed as being responsible for the spiritual benefits that result in baptism. In baptism it is God who acts. The human actions are only a humble reception of the divine act. It is God who washes away our sins with the blood of Christ, buries us together with Christ into His death, raises us with Christ, and brings us into the body of Christ. While willing participation on behalf of the believer is necessary, it does not warrant any merit except for the fact that it is an act of obedience. The Scriptures never consider this act of obedience as the foundation of the saving effects in baptism, but always attribute them to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

To examine whether baptism is of works, we need to first consider the meaning of the term “works.” By “works of the law,” the Scriptures are speaking of attempting to achieve righteousness by observing and meeting the requirements of the law. The nature of this means to justification is that it seeks to earn righteousness before God rather than to receive it freely. Herein lies the distinction

between justification by works and justification by faith: the former claims man's merit, but the latter does not; the former denies the works of Christ, but the latter rests upon them. Thus, it would be wrong to view any and all forms of actions as "works of the law." To believe is an action, just as repentance and confessing the name of Christ are actions. But such actions are actions that respond to and receive the grace of God. They do not constitute attempts to be justified by works.

Nowhere in the Scriptures can we find any reference to baptism being associated with the works of the law. On the contrary, the Scriptures present baptism in the context of grace and faith. Take the baptism passage in Colossians for example:

*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col 2:11–13)*

Even though baptism is at the heart of this passage, we see no indication whatsoever that baptism is of the works of the law. In fact, it is an instrument of God's grace. It is Christ who circumcises us, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. It is He who makes us alive together with Him. It is He who forgives all our trespasses. All of these works done by the hand of Christ take effect in us in baptism. This passage further teaches us that our resurrection with Christ in baptism is through faith in the working of God. Faith in God's grace underlies the spiritual effect of baptism. Baptism is of faith, not of works.

Cottrell observes the striking parallel between this passage and Ephesians 2:1–13, a key passage cited earlier on God's saving grace.<sup>65</sup> Both passages discuss our former death in sin and state of uncircumcision. They both speak of being made alive and raised up together with Christ. Both attribute the spiritual transformations to the work

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65 Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1989), 150–151.

of God. The passage in Ephesians stresses that we have been saved by grace through faith, while the parallel passage in Colossians mentions baptism as the occasion for God's saving work. There is perfect harmony between these passages, and one supplements the other. Baptism is in no way opposed to salvation by grace through faith, but is actually an integral part of it.

# Chapter 9

## HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM

If the baptismal candidate is required to believe and repent, should infants be baptized? We shall address this question by looking at the Biblical teachings on salvation and the household as well as examples of household baptisms in the New Testament.

Households in the Bible consisted of the heads of the household and all of their household members, including spouse, children, resident relatives, and servants bought with money or born in their house. The household was a tightly-knit entity, and was represented by its head, who made decisions and acted on behalf of all the members of the household.

This type of representative headship applies to matters related to one's accountability to God. As such, Joshua was able to declare on behalf of his household their commitment to the LORD: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15). The sins of the heads of households brought the LORD's wrath upon their entire households, including wives, sons, daughters and little children (Gen 12:14–17; 20:1–18; Num 16:25–33; Josh 7:24–26). The LORD also proclaimed that He would visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Him, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Him and keep His commandments (Ex 20:5, 6; 34:7). The faith and actions of the heads of the household, therefore, had a direct bearing on their households.

### A. BIBLICAL BASIS FOR BAPTISM OF HOUSEHOLDS

1. God's grace and the household
  - a. In the old covenant

From God's covenantal relationship with His people in history, it is evident that the concept of the household plays



an important part. God offered His grace and promises not only to individuals, but also to entire households. No one was excluded from God's covenant on the basis of age.

God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to make him a great nation. The LORD said to him, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you" (Gen 17:4). Even though God's covenant was with Abraham, He required Abraham as well as his descendants after him to keep the covenant. The LORD commanded that every male child belonging to Abraham be circumcised in the flesh, including he who was born in his house or bought with money. This covenant in the flesh must be kept throughout all generations (Gen 17:9–14; 23–27).

Circumcision, although performed only on the male child, was a sign that represented the inclusion of the entire household in the covenant of God. Being a part of God's covenant did not guarantee that one would ultimately receive the inheritance. Each individual was still personally accountable to God, and must obey God's commands by faith. Abraham was justified by faith in God's promises, but his faith could not substitute for the faith of all his sons, even though they had also been circumcised. Nevertheless, God made Abraham and his descendants enter into a covenantal relationship with Him regardless of the personal choice of his descendants. Simply being born or bought into the household afforded a person the privilege of being in a covenant with God.

When the Israelites were in the land of Moab, the LORD commanded Moses to make a covenant with them and to teach the people to keep the words of the covenant. Moses' call to enter into the covenant with the LORD included, "your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water" (Deut 29:1–15). While little children did not have the ability to fully comprehend the words spoken to them, they were part of the covenant God made with the Israelites.

Time and again we see that God extended His covenantal promises and blessings to the children of the Israelites, as can be seen in the following passages:

*Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. (Deut 30:6)*

*But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. (Ps 103:17, 18)*

*All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children. (Isa 54:13)*

When we consider God's acts of deliverance in history, we also observe that His saving grace came upon entire households. Before sending the flood to destroy all flesh on the earth, the LORD promised to establish a covenant with Noah. This covenant included Noah's household, and the command for Noah to enter the ark applied not only to Noah but also his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives (Gen 6:18; 7:1; Heb 11:7). When God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He "remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." (Gen 19:29). While God's primary concern was for the righteous Lot (cf. 2 Pet 2:6–8), He also delivered his wife and daughters (Gen 19:15). When taking Lot out of the city, the angels said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place!" (Gen 19:12). Anyone who belonged to Lot was shown mercy for Lot's sake.

God's preservation of the Israelites during the Passover was also by households. Each household was to take a lamb, kill it, put the blood on the doorposts and lintel, and eat the flesh within the house (Ex 12:1–11, 21–23). Only the circumcised may eat of the Passover meal (Ex 12:43–49). Thus, God's deliverance was rooted in His covenantal relationship with Abraham and his descendants. On the

very same night, the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, thereby delivering them out of bondage. Likewise, God delivered them from the army of the Egyptians by leading them through the Red Sea (Ex 14:10–31). All Israelites, regardless of age, experienced God’s mighty deliverance. Even little children, who did not have the capacity to choose to leave Egypt, were brought out. They, like their parents, were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ate the spiritual food, and drank of the spiritual Rock (1Cor 10:1–4).

Even in the case where God’s grace came upon a non-Israelite, the household became involved. The two spies who were saved by Rahab instructed her to bring all of her father’s household into her own home to be spared of the impending destruction (Josh 2:17–20; 6:25). The blessing promised to Rahab as a result of her faith extended to everyone else in her father’s household.

b. In the new covenant

Because of the weakness of the flesh, man was unable to be justified under the old covenant. A new covenant was necessary. However, God’s will never changed. The introduction of the new covenant does not mean that God has forsaken His promises. Rather, through the atoning blood of Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the new covenant fulfills that which God had promised under the old covenant. God’s covenant with Abraham to be God to Abraham and his descendants was an everlasting covenant (Gen 17:7). Through faith in Christ Jesus, expressed in baptism into Christ, a believer becomes Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26–29). The extent of God’s grace broadens under the new covenant to reach beyond the physical descendants of Abraham to include all who walk in the steps of Abraham’s faith (Rom 4:11, 12). This actually fulfills the promise that in Abraham all nations should be blessed (Gal 3:8). Therefore, the hope the gospel offers to believers today is the very hope of the chosen people in the old covenant (Acts 26:6, 7).

In the Gospels, the Lord Jesus speaks of spiritual kinship and the impact of discipleship on one's family relations. Whoever does the will of the heavenly Father is considered the Lord's brother and sister and mother (Mt 12:48-50). Anyone who comes to Christ and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and his own life cannot be His disciple (Lk 14:26). Christ has also brought division to families, so that father will be divided against son, mother against daughter, and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law (Lk 12:49-53). A disciple of Christ must set his loyalty to Christ above his natural family relations. However, the Lord's teachings regarding discipleship do not constitute an obliteration of all family ties. Neither do they place the household of believers outside of God's grace. As under the old covenant, each individual is accountable to God. But this presents no contradiction with the inclusion of household members in the covenant.

If we examine the Scriptures' promise of the new covenant, we notice the same concern for the children of those who are under the covenant:

*All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children." (Isa 54:13)*

*"As for Me," says the LORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore." (Isa 59:21)*

*They shall not build and another inhabit;  
They shall not plant and another eat;  
For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people,  
And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
They shall not labor in vain,  
Nor bring forth children for trouble;  
For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD,  
And their offspring with them.  
(Isa 65:22, 23)*

*"If those ordinances depart  
From before Me, says the LORD,*

*Then the seed of Israel shall also cease  
From being a nation before Me forever.”*

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“If heaven above can be measured,  
And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath,  
I will also cast off all the seed of Israel  
For all that they have done, says the LORD.*

*(Jer 31:36, 37)*

*They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will  
give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me  
forever, for the good of them and their children after them.  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I  
will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My  
fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jer  
32:38–40)*

*For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For  
behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He  
who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His  
name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From genera-  
tion to generation. (Lk 1:48–50)*

The Lord's covenantal blessings included not only those who were first chosen but also their offspring. The covenant given to God's people is to be passed down from generation to generation. Even the descendants of the chosen ones who are yet to be born are given the privilege to be partakers of the covenant simply on the basis of their family ties.

Thus, the apostles included the household in the proclamation of the gospel. Peter declared to the men on the Day of Pentecost that the promise of remission of sins through repentance and baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit is given “to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38, 39). Paul and Silas answered the jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). The call to believe in the gospel, while demanding a personal decision and commitment, did not exclude the household of the believer. On the contrary,

the grace of God offered to the head of the household is extended to his entire household.

2. Salvation is for everyone

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (Jn 3:16, 17). Everyone in this world is in need of salvation, so God sent the Lord Jesus Christ into this world to give His life as a ransom for all and the propitiation for the whole world (Mt 20:28; 1Tim 2:5, 6; Tit 2:11; 1Jn 2:2). After His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18–20; Mk 16:15, 16; Lk 24:46, 47). The salvation of God, which began with the nation of Israel, has now come to people of all men regardless of race (Acts 10:34, 35; Tit 2:11). God is not willing that any should perish but desires all men to be saved (1Tim 2:3, 4; 2Pet 3:9).

The terms that express the all-encompassing nature of salvation, such as “the whole world,” “all,” and “every creature,” refer to the entire human race, including children and infants as well as adults. All souls are equally precious in the sight of God, and God does not neglect even the little ones (Mt 18:1–14). To the disciples who rebuked those who had brought little children to the Lord to be blessed, the Lord Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:13–15; Mk 10:13–16; Lk 18:15–17). The Lord Jesus loves and receives children and infants. Therefore, we may bring our children to Him to accept His grace of salvation.

3. Children and infants are also sinners

Christ died for the sins of the whole world because the world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1Jn 5:19) and is in need of redemption. The whole human race, including young and old, has sinned and must face the judgment that awaits all (Heb 9:27).

It may be difficult to understand or accept how infants could be sinful, since they are not able to discern right and wrong or to consciously disobey God. But the Scriptures tell us that the state of sin in which the world lies is the result of Adam's disobedience:

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (Rom 5:12–14)*

God had warned Adam that death would be the consequence of disobedience (Gen 2:17). After Adam and Eve had sinned against God, God drove them out of the garden of Eden and sealed the way to the tree of life with a flaming sword (Gen 3:22–24). Man had lost the close communion he once had with God. This was spiritual death. Furthermore, man must also die a physical death by returning to dust (Gen 3:19). Thus, through Adam, sin entered the world, and death through sin. The death that was the result of Adam's sin spread to all men, and death reigned even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam. Everyone born after Adam is subject to the dominion of death that came through the sin committed by Adam. The Scriptures indicate that “all sinned” (Rom 5:12). This means that all fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). All of us have lost the image and likeness of God in which He made us. Little children and infants, therefore, are also sinners who are away from God's presence and who are under death's dominion.

With this in mind, we can understand David's words when he said, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5). Job, likewise speaks of the uncleanness of all mortal men (Job 14:1–4). We are born into a world of sin even without having made the choice to disobey God. Only God can deliver us from the power of darkness and convey us into the kingdom of the Son of His love through redemption in Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:13,

14). Since the washing away of sins by the blood of Christ takes place in baptism, and since all are under the power of darkness, even infants and little children need to be baptized to be delivered from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ.

#### 4. Faith and the baptism of infants

We have seen in our study that faith and baptism are inseparable. The baptismal candidate is therefore required to believe in the Lord Jesus and repent of his sins. For this reason, many Christians contend that infants should not be baptized because they cannot profess faith.

However, the Bible also teaches that while faith is necessary for salvation, the inability of an infant to express faith does not preclude them from being saved. God's grace upon infants is not undermined by their lack of mental or moral capacity. In the same way, faith is necessary for baptism, but the inability of an infant to express faith does not preclude them from baptism.

A natural question arises: how can the sin of infants be washed away if they are not able to believe, confess, and repent? We now address the relationship between a parent's faith and the baptism of infants and children.

We have examined the Scriptures and concluded that the choice of the heads of the household to trust and obey God has a direct bearing on the standing of their households before God. God's grace came upon whole households because of the faith of the heads of the household. Through Noah's faith, his whole household was saved (Heb 11:7). By the faith of the Israelites in keeping the Passover and crossing the Red Sea, all their households were delivered from Egypt (Heb 11:28, 29). In the story of Jonah, we also find a specific reference to the deliverance of infants. God had intended to overthrow Nineveh because of its wickedness. Even infants, who could not "discern between their right hand and their left" (Jon 4:11), faced this impending disaster. But the Ninevites believed God and repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah (Jon 3:4-10). As a result, God relented. Just as the sins of the adults placed



the infants in danger of judgment, their belief and repentance resulted in the deliverance of their infants.

Throughout the Gospels, we also see that Jesus' grace extended to children through the faith of the heads of households. In all cases, the children did not come to Jesus on their own. Though they were the ones who were eventually healed, they remained in the fringe of the respective gospel accounts. It was the parents who brought the children's need before Jesus.

The children were passive, by circumstance; the heads of household were active, by choice. Even so, grace came to the child through the actions of the parents. Grace thereby came to the entire house. We emphasize that the parents' faith was not credited vicariously onto the children to empower their healing. In fact, the children did not exhibit any form of faith that qualified him for the healing. The only act of faith apparent was from the parents' end—they presented the request before the compassionate Lord Jesus—and healing came. This was the spirit in which Jesus granted grace during His ministry—little ones, unable to confess faith, were not disqualified from receiving tangible grace in their lives. It is in the same spirit that the covenant promises are bestowed today.

In the healing of the nobleman's son, the nobleman asked Jesus to visit his home in Capernaum to heal his son (Jn 4:46–54). His son's condition rendered him unable to come to Jesus, for he was "at the point of death" (Jn 4:47). Therefore his father implored on his behalf. At Jesus' word, the nobleman believed, and went his way. His son was healed that very hour.

Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, came to Jesus in like manner. At first approach, his twelve year old daughter was also at the point of death (Mk 5:23). Along the way, someone from the house reported that she had died (Lk 8:49). But Jesus exhorted Jairus not to be afraid, but only believe. Eventually the daughter was resurrected by Jesus on account of her father's faith.

Finally, the Canaanite woman who was a Greek, of Syro-Phoenician descent, faced a similar situation. Her daughter was

severely demon-possessed (Mt 15:22). But her persistence and faith resulted in Jesus' healing of her daughter.

In all three parent-child relationships and healings, we note that the parents exhibited all the confessions and proclamations of faith. The children not only were in a physical condition incapable of confessing faith, they might not even have been able to express any faith because of their age. However, again, their incapability of expressing faith was not a disqualification of grace. Grace and healing came unto them because of the requesting in faith of the parents.

For the centurion, we have a master-servant relationship rather than a parent-child relationship. However this is still within the confines of the household definition. The servant is recorded as being dear to the centurion (Lk 7:2). He might even have been of adult age. But his circumstance prevented him from approaching Jesus himself. His master must make the request on behalf of him. He was passive; he did nothing. Regardless, grace extended to the entire house, of which the servant belongs. Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith and declared, "As you have believed, so let it be done for you" (Mt 8:13).

Bearing in mind that Jesus granted grace to children through parents' requests, we now broach the subject of why infants should not be denied baptism even though they cannot profess faith.

It is evident that an infant cannot believe, confess sins, and integrate himself into the holy community like an adult. However, the opportunity for infant baptism does not depend on what the child is able to do. Neither is it because the parent's faith is imputed and merited to the child. Infants may be baptized because the believing parents have an existing covenant with God, which is promised to them and to their children (Gen 17:7, Act 2:39). Conversely, if a covenantal relationship does not exist between God and a parent (i.e., if the parent is an unbeliever), then the infant is not to be baptized. Thus, it is the belief or disbelief of the parents that determines the infant's baptism.

In the very act of infant baptism, the children are brought to the Lord in faith, to receive the blood of Christ for the remission of sins. It is the parent's faith that brings them before the Lord, not the infant's. The infant, by circumstance, is a passive recipient of grace, just like the previously mentioned healings in the Gospels. They cannot choose grace and salvation. They only inherit the promises of salvation through their parents. Their plight is presented by the parents to God in the action of coming to baptism. Their plight is sin; their healing is the washing by the blood of Christ.

The parents are then obligated to educate the child in the way of the Lord. While the covenant extended to the family, obedience to the covenant is still individual. The grown child is eventually accountable for his own decision whether or not to remain in the covenant. Along the way, the parents should fulfill their role to bring them to know God and his teachings.

## **B. PRACTICE OF HOUSEHOLD BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Some take the lack of a specific command in the New Testament to baptize infants as evidence that the early church did not baptize infants. But the lack of a specific command does not imply that infants were excluded from the concept of the "household." The book of Acts contains a number of examples of household baptism. As we have previously shown, the definition of "household" in the Old Testament includes children and infants. Without evidence to the contrary, this definition remains true in the New Testament. Just as we would not exclude children and infants from the definition of "family" today, we have no basis for "household" in the Bible to exclude children and infants.

### **1. Cornelius**

In the account of Cornelius' conversion, Luke describes how the apostle Peter ordered Cornelius and the other Gentiles present to be baptized after they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:46-48).

In Acts 11:13, 14, Peter recounted his preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles: “[Cornelius] told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ‘who will tell you words by which *you and all your household* will be saved’” (emphasis added). It is important to note that the angel told Cornelius, the head of his household, “you” will be saved; this “you” is then followed by “and all your household”.

First, the fact that Cornelius, as the head of household, would be saved means that God’s promise of salvation not only extended to him but to all his household. This is consistent with the fact that family solidarity, not individualism, was the norm for the cultures of the patriarchs, Israelite monarchy, Herodian Jews, and even pagan societies around the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>66</sup>

Second, the conversion of Cornelius and his household is consistent with the biblical concept that God’s promises extend to “households” as a unit. This is the norm and not the exception throughout the Bible (Gen 17:7–9; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:39; Jn 4:53).

Peter’s final command to be baptized was a crucial part of “the words by which you and all your household will be saved,” for baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Therefore, we may infer that Cornelius’ household was baptized along with Cornelius. If there had been children in the household, Peter would not have hesitated to baptize them because in his view, the remission of sins through baptism was a promise to the children of believers also (Acts 2:39).

## 2. Lydia

Acts 16:14, 15 reads,

*Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when **she and her household** were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If*

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<sup>66</sup> Jonathan M. Watt, “The Oikos Formula,” in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2003), 84.

*you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us." (emphasis added)*

Lydia's heart was opened by the Lord to heed the gospel being preached by Paul. The result that followed was, "Lydia and her household were baptized."

We can infer that Lydia was the head of the household because Lydia's household is described as "her" household, and she made important household decisions like inviting Paul to stay at "her" house (Acts 16:15). Once Lydia, the head of her household, had believed, she also brought her whole family to the Lord and they were all baptized with her. This again expresses the idea of family unity or solidarity in matters of faith. God's saving grace comes not only upon individuals, but entire households as well. It is also the responsibility of the head of the household to bring his family members to faith and baptism.

### 3. The Philippian Jailer

In Acts 16:31–34, after Paul and Silas had been freed from prison, they preached the gospel to the Philippian jailer. They told the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, *you and your household*" (emphasis added). The narrative continues:

*Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately **he and all his family were baptized**. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God **with all his household** (emphasis added).*

Again, we see here the idea of family solidarity. Although Paul and Silas were speaking only to the jailer, they assured him that his belief in Christ would result in the salvation of his whole family. In other words, it was also expected of the head of the household to lead the whole family to faith and baptism. True enough, the Philippian jailer believed in the Lord with all his household (Acts 16:34). His entire household accepted the preaching of the apostles and was baptized the very same night.

#### 4. Crispus

In Acts 18:1–8, Paul and his group arrived in Corinth and attempted to preach to the Jews in the synagogue. Having hit a roadblock there, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles and entered into the house of a man named Titius Justus, a God-fearing gentile, whose house was next to Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue.

Later, as Luke’s narrative continues, Crispus believes. Acts 18:8 says: “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord *with all his household*. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (emphasis added).

Here, the Bible describes how the head of the household, Crispus, believed with all his household. We are later told that Paul baptized Crispus (1 Cor 1:14). Following the consistent pattern in Acts, this meant that baptism was not just for Crispus but also extended his whole household.

Acts 18:8 once again confirms that the household, not the individual, was the basic unit in the early church in terms of conversion to Christ and reception of the covenantal promise of salvation. Although it is not explicitly stated that Crispus’ household was baptized, the mention of the baptism of the Corinthian believers in the same context presupposes it.

#### 5. Stephanas

In 1 Corinthians 1:10–12, the apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian members in the context of sectarian divisions within the Corinthian church. Members claimed sects based on various church leaders or even Christ.

In this context, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:14–16:

*I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized **the household of Stephanas**. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other (emphasis added).*

Paul mentions the baptism of the household of Stephanas. This not only confirms the household as the basic unit of conversion in the New Testament church, it further attests to the

practice of baptizing whole households, including children and infants, in the New Testament church.

Some commentators argue that the household conversions found in Acts and 1 Corinthians do not show that the New Testament church baptized infants. The main point of their objection is that these biblical accounts of household conversions speak of actions such as “hearing” the gospel message, “believing,” and “speaking in tongues.” The implication is that the households who were baptized excluded infants or did not have any infants at all.

We must bear in mind that when the authors narrated the actions of the adult members of the household, their purpose was not to show that children and infants were absent or excluded. Instead, they simply convey that God’s salvation came to whole households—seen as unities that acted according to the will, direction, and faith of their respective heads of household. Therefore, we may not assume the exclusion of infants based on the description of what the adult members did. The writers would not need to explicitly record statements such as “He believed in the Lord with all his household, although the infants in the household were unable to understand or believe” because households were simply viewed as integral units.

These accounts do not suggest that a head of household’s faith can substitute for its members’ faith or negate a household member’s personal accountability; rather, they do show that whole households acted in unison, were converted, and received the gospel of salvation. While it is true that faith is very much a personal matter, faith cannot be understood only on an individual level. God relates to us not only as individuals but as households.

Personal obedience, accountability, and faith all play a role in our receiving of God’s grace. But this does not invalidate God’s covenant with individuals and their households. Based upon this, the New Testament church practiced household baptism, including the baptism of infants and children. Without any prohibition against infant baptism, we must be careful not to exclude infants from the household baptisms practiced in the New Testament. In the same way, we also must be careful not to prohibit infant baptism today.

### C. BRINGING UP CHILDREN UNDER GOD'S COVENANT

The baptism of the entire household does not guarantee that every member will be saved in the end. Even though the entire household, including the children, enters into God's covenant of salvation through baptism, it is still essential that every member establish their own faith and relationship with God. The heads of the household who have brought their children to baptism need to take up the responsibility of also teaching them and guiding them in the faith.

1. Each individual is responsible for their own salvation

By God's gracious will children and infants may come to Christ to be baptized because they are members of the households of believers. But this does not mean that they are guaranteed eternal life. Baptism must be accompanied by a life-long faith in the Lord (Rom 11:22; Heb 6:4–8; 10:19–39).

We can see this manner of covenant fulfillment in Isaiah 58:13, 14:

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,  
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,  
And call the Sabbath a delight,  
The holy day of the LORD honorable,  
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,  
Nor finding your own pleasure,  
Nor speaking your own words,  
Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD;  
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,  
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.  
The mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

The structure of this passage is of the "If-Then" type: If we fulfill the content of the covenant to which we enter into upon baptism, then we shall delight in the LORD, fed with the heritage of Jacob.

As heads of our households, it is our responsibility to bring our family into God's covenant through baptism. After entering the covenant as a family unit, each member of our family needs to develop their personal relationship with God to fulfill the contents of the promise that was inherited. Each person



is ultimately responsible for their own salvation (Ezek 18:20). Parents cannot be saved for their children, and children cannot be saved for their parents. It is essential that each person abide by the covenant, and that includes children. Since they are young and unable to understand their tasks, the primary responsibility to instruct them to live a godly life lies with the parents. The church has a secondary role to instruct and remind both the parents and the children about the covenant.

## 2. Responsibilities of the Parents

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Gal 3:26, 27)*

*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev 7:14)*

After baptism, our children have put on Christ, and their sins have been washed away. Their robes are white after being washed in the blood of the Lamb. In the same way children learn to keep their clothes clean, they need to be taught how to live a godly life. This responsibility lies with the parents. The parents must provide a Christian upbringing for their children, teaching them to abide by the terms of the covenant so that when the children grow up, they will continue to abide in the Lord (Prov 22:6). Moses instructed the Israelite parents as to what the content of the covenant is, and how to teach it to them:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD your God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9)*

In short, Moses told the parents to create an environment that is conducive to teaching the children about God and His

promises. This means setting family devotional time, covering topics that are suitable for the developmental maturity of the children. Young children need to be raised in the LORD with heavy involvement of the parents, explicitly instructing on what is permissible and what is not. Older children will benefit from observing their parents lead by example. For grown children, they can serve the Lord together with their parents as a family unit. This concept of unity in servitude and worship can begin even at the youngest age. At every stage of the children's growth, the parents need to teach and guide them in the terms of the covenant. Therefore, Paul instructed Christian fathers, "Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Eph 6:4)

The parents themselves must also remain in the terms of the covenant for the sake of their children. The faith of the head of the household brings God's covenantal blessings upon the entire family (cf. Gen 7:1; 18:18, 19; Acts 10:1-48; 16:13-15; 31-34). Children benefit from their parents' observance of covenantal terms by virtue of the fact that God blesses their parents. Although the children are not accountable or punishable for the sins committed by their parents, they will definitely suffer if the parents are suffering the consequences of sin. When the parents remain within the bounds of the covenant, their entire household flourishes in the blessings of God (Ps 128:1-6). This creates a nurturing environment in which the children can grow in faith, and learn what they should do to fulfill God's covenant.

# Exegetical Studies

# Matthew 3:1–17

- 1 *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*
- 2 *and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*
- 3 *For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'"*
- 4 *Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.*
- 5 *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him*
- 6 *and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*
- 7 *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*
- 8 *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,*
- 9 *and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*
- 10 *And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*
- 11 *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*
- 12 *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*
- 13 *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.*
- 14 *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"*
- 15 *But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.*

- 16 *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.*
- 17 *And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. John's calling
  - i. The fulfillment of the words of the prophecy
  - ii. Prepared the way of the Lord
  - iii. Preached and lived like a prophet
- b. John's preaching
  - i. He preached repentance, which entails a changed life
  - ii. Proclaimed the coming of the mightier One, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire
  - iii. Warned of the judgment that would befall the unrepentant
- c. John's baptism
  - i. Connected to the confession of sins
  - ii. A baptism of repentance
- d. The baptism of Jesus
  - i. Jesus explained that He needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, i.e., to fulfill God's will
  - ii. After Jesus' baptism, the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven attested to Jesus' divine sonship

## 2. SETTING

Matthew introduces John the Baptist, who preached repentance and baptized the people in the wilderness of Judea. John proclaimed the coming of the mightier One, setting the stage for the arrival of Jesus.

The account of John's ministry culminates in Jesus' coming to John to receive baptism. Matthew uses *παράγινεται* ("he came") to usher in the two main figures and to establish a connection

between them. Compare “John arrives” (παραγίνεται Ἰωάννης; v. 1) and “Jesus arrives” (παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς; v. 13). This also marks the two major sections of the passage: John’s ministry (vv. 1–12) and Jesus’ baptism (vv. 13–17).

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. John’s arrival

John the Baptist came at a time and in a manner according to divine will. The expression “in those days” (v. 1) does not refer to a specific time but links back to the preceding infancy narratives and connects the timing of John’s ministry with Jesus’ birth. In the prophetic writings, “in those days” sometimes signified a divinely appointed time (cf. Jer 33:15, 16; Joel 2:29; 3:1; Zech 8:23). Thus, John began his ministry at an appointed time according to God’s plan.

The work John came to carry out also fulfilled God’s plan. As foretold by the prophet Isaiah, John’s preaching was “the voice of the one crying in the wilderness” (v. 3). His mission was to “prepare the way the way of the Lord” and “make His paths straight” (Isa 40:3) by preaching the message of repentance. His clothing and diet befitted that of a prophet preaching in the wilderness. His clothing and leather belt were reminiscent of Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8), whom the Scripture identifies John the Baptist with (Mt 11:13, 14; 17:12, 13). These descriptions of John and his ministry present him as a prophet sent by God with a message and a mission.

#### b. John’s preaching

The message John proclaimed was “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (v. 2) The same message was later repeated by Jesus and His disciples (cf. Mt 4:17; 10:7). A new era began with John’s proclamation of the arrival of God’s kingdom.

##### i. “Repent” (v. 2)

John began his preaching with the call to repentance. Etymologically, μετανοέω, the Greek word for “repent”, means change of mind (μετά; = after; νοῦς = mind). νοῦς in

its New Testament usage has the following possible shades of meaning:

1. “Mind” or “disposition” as in the inner orientation or moral attitude.
2. Moral consciousness that determines will and action.
3. Understanding.
4. “Thought,” “judgment,” “resolve.”<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, the call to repentance is more than a call to feel sorry for past wrongs committed. Repentance involves a conversion of the heart that results in a change of the whole person.

John’s preaching clearly emphasizes a concrete change in actions as an outcome of repentance. He warned the Pharisees and Sadducees that they had to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (v. 8). A person whose life does not conform to the way of God is like a tree that does not bear fruit, and his end is destruction. The urgency in the call to repentance is reinforced by the present tenses in the saying: “even now the ax is [being] laid to the root of the trees” and “every tree which does not bear good fruit is [being] cut down and thrown into the fire” (v. 10).

- ii. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 2)

The reason the people had to repent was that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand.” “Heaven” (οὐρανός) can refer to the place of God’s presence (cf. Mk 6:41; Jn 17:1; Rev 11:13; 16:11). “Kingdom” (βασιλεία) may denote kingly authority (cf. Lk 19:12, 15; Rev 17:12) or the domain over which a king rules (Mt 12:25; Mk 6:23). The expression “kingdom of heaven” is used interchangeably with “the kingdom of God” in Matthew 19:23, 24. Thus, the kingdom of heaven refers to God’s reign, which originates from above.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand (or literally “has approached” in Greek). If this is a reference to the proximity

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<sup>67</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 4:959.

in time, it may denote the reign of Christ through the church, which began with the resurrection of Christ (cf. Mt 28:18). The nearness of the kingdom of heaven could also mean that the reign of God is now readily experienced and received by those who accept and submit to Christ (cf. Mt 5:3, 10; 6:33; 12:28; Mk 10:15; Lk 10:9–11; 17:20, 21).

### iii. The mightier One

John's preaching finally led up to the announcement of "He who is coming after me" (v. 11), who would be mightier and much greater than John. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, as indicated by the Lord Jesus and Peter, refers to the outpour of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:15, 16). Through the Holy Spirit, Christ would abide and reign within believers (Jn 14:16–20; Rom 8:10, 11).

"Fire," if understood in the positive sense as part of Christ's baptism of believers, is a reference to the purifying work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa 4:2–5; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:2, 3). In the message of John, fire also symbolizes divine judgment, which consumes the unrepentant (vv. 10, 12).

John thus presented the one coming after him as the Lord who brings blessings to the righteous and woe to the wicked. Like a farmer who uses a winnowing fan to separate the wheat and the chaff, Christ separates the righteous and the wicked.

### c. John's baptism

The ministry of John was characterized by baptism. For this reason, he was known as "the Baptist."

The people were baptized, confessing their sins (v. 6).

ἐξομολογούμενοι ("while confessing") is a present-middle participle. This indicates that baptism must be coupled with the confession of sins.

John called his baptism a baptism with water "unto repentance" (v. 11). What does this tell us about the function and purpose of John's baptism? There are two dominant views, depending



on whether the word εἰς (“unto”) is understood as 1. “in view of,” meaning baptism is an expression of repentance, or 2. “for,” implying that repentance is the goal or result of baptism.

It is not necessary to espouse one interpretation to the exclusion of the other. Repentance, as we have seen, is more than a change of mind or a feeling of remorse for one’s sins, but a conversion process during which a person’s life is entirely turned over to God. Therefore, repentance is both the prerequisite and outcome of baptism. In other words, the baptism the people received from John expressed a change of heart as well as signaled the beginning of a converted life.

Furthermore, John’s announcement of the coming of Christ makes it clear that his baptism was an anticipation of Christ’s baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Hence, by receiving John’s baptism, the people acknowledged their sins, turned towards God, and were made ready for the coming of the Messiah.

#### d. The baptism of Jesus

Matthew’s narrative underscores Jesus’ express purpose of going to the Jordan—“to be baptized by John” (v. 13).

The question that comes immediately to mind is why did Jesus have to be baptized? If John’s baptism was unto repentance and was received with the confession of sins, why did Jesus, who was without sin, come to receive John’s baptism?

##### i. John’s attempt to deter Jesus

John’s question, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” (v. 14) shows his perplexity at Jesus’ intention. If at this point John recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, his reluctance would certainly be understandable. How could the ultimate Baptizer, the mightier One whom John had proclaimed, come to be baptized by His forerunner?

However, according to John 1:31-34, John did not as yet know Jesus’ divinity. In this case, John’s reluctance may be explained by John’s high regard for Jesus based on his

knowledge of Jesus, such as His miraculous birth and extraordinary understanding of the Scriptures as a child.

ii. Jesus' response

Jesus responded with the words, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (v. 15). This statement, found only in Matthew, is the key to understanding Jesus' intention to be baptized.

Rather than being an abstract quality, "righteousness" is concretely expressed in actions that conform to God's will (see excursus). Although being baptized by John was not stipulated in the Old Testament laws, John had been sent to baptize according to God's righteous will (Mt 21:32). In this passage, Jesus further revealed that it was God's will for Him to be baptized by John. Being born under law, Jesus, like His fellow men, had to subject Himself to God's righteousness by carrying out God's requirements. In God's plan of salvation, John's baptism of Jesus served a divine purpose.

Thus, it was necessary (literally "fitting" in Greek) for both John and Jesus to carry out God's command in order to fulfill all righteousness. To fulfill all righteousness means to perform every one of God's requirements, and Jesus' baptism was one such divine mandate. In fact, Jesus' entire life was devoted to fulfilling all righteousness. Jesus' words to John, therefore, were an invitation, even an imperative, to John to join Him in fulfilling God's will. With this changed perspective in mind, John consented. Furthermore, Jesus' call to fulfill all righteousness and His personal example of submission behooves all believers to likewise carry out all of the Lord's commands to fulfill all righteousness (cf. Mt 28:20).

"Fulfill," is a key word in Matthew. It emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Scriptures.<sup>68</sup> Jesus Himself also stated that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17, 18). Here, Jesus' act of obedience in His

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68 Cf. Mt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9

baptism was part of His life-long mission to entirely fulfill God's will.

iii. Divine revelation after the baptism

After Jesus had been baptized and had come up from the water, the heavens were opened. The opening of the heavens in the Scriptures connotes divine revelation or bestowment of God's favor (cf. Deut 28:12; Ps 78:23–25; Ezek 1:1; Isa 64:1; Mal 3:10; Jn 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 19:11). Here, the opening of the heavens likewise signals a moment of revelation and divine approval.

In the heavenly vision, the Spirit of God descended as a dove and came upon Jesus. This fulfilled the Messianic prophecy that God would put His Spirit upon the Anointed One (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). This event served as a testimony to John and to all Israel that Jesus was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:31–34).

The declaration of the voice from heaven marks the climax of the narrative. The heavenly Father spoke concerning Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). The pronouncement of Jesus' divine sonship is central to the story of Jesus' baptism. God's declaration of Jesus as "My beloved Son" was a clear sign of His approval of Jesus' act of obedience in baptism. Moreover, it marked the Messianic fulfillment of the coronation psalm, Psalm 2, and Isaiah's prophecy about the suffering servant (Isa 42:1). Jesus, the son of God, who would inherit the nations and rule with a rod of iron, was also the gentle and humble servant who would suffer for the sins of humanity.

#### 4. EXCURSUS

"Righteousness" in the Old Testament was a divine attribute rooted in God's covenant with His people (Neh 9:8). God exhibited His righteousness by keeping His covenant, exercising justice and offering salvation (Ps 22:31; 40:9, 10; 71:15, 16; 98:1, 2; Isa 41:10; 42:6; 45:8; 51:5; 56:1; Mic 6:4, 5). Thus, God's acts were called "righteous acts" (Jdg 5:11; 1Sam 12:7). The people of God,

who experienced God's acts of righteousness, called Him "our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6; 33:16).

On the other hand, God's people participated in God's righteousness by keeping the laws of the covenant (cf. Deut 4:8; Ps 119:138, 172). He imputed His righteousness to those who trusted in His covenant (cf. Gen 15:6), and demanded His people to be righteous by obeying His commandments and acting justly (Deut 6:25; 24:13; Isa 56:1; 64:5). Thus, a person was righteous in God's eyes if he trusted and obeyed the will of God.

Likewise, the New Testament applies the word "righteousness" to God's just acts (Acts 17:31; Rev 19:11) and to man's acts of obedience to God's will (Mt 5:20; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:14; Jas 3:18; Rom 9:30; 10:5). More importantly, under the new covenant, God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel of salvation (Rom 1:17; 3:25, 26).

# Matthew 28:16–20

- 16 *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.*
- 17 *When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.*
- 18 *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*
- 19 *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*
- 20 *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism is the Lord’s command (v. 19)
- b. Baptizing is part of discipleship-making (v. 19)
- c. Baptizing “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19) is baptizing in the name of Jesus

## 2. SETTING

The concluding passage of Matthew forms the crowning point of the resurrection narrative as well as the entire Gospel. On the mountain which Jesus had appointed, the Lord entrusted them with the great commission—the subject of the present study. The charge to baptize is an essential and integral part of the commission, and its inclusion in the commission underscores baptism’s vital role in Christian conversion.

Baptizing as the central element in the passage is also noticeable in the passage’s structure. As Schieber observes, we can discern a

concentric structure: A, authority (v. 18b); B, making disciples (v. 19a); C, baptizing (v. 19b); B', teaching (v. 20a); and A', presence (v. 20b).<sup>69</sup>

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Baptism is the Lord's command

In this passage, the risen Lord sends His followers into the world with the great commission. The repeated use of the word "all" heightens the weight and magnitude of the commission:

- The basis for the commission is that "all authority" in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ
- The scope of evangelization is "all nations"
- The Lord bids the disciples to teach "all that I have commanded you"
- The presence of the Lord will be with His followers for "all the days"

It cannot be overemphasized that the necessity and importance of baptism rest on the Lord's command. As such, baptism is not a human institution but is required by Christ Himself. Through His God-given authority over heaven and earth, the Lord sends the disciples into the world to lead all peoples to repentance and forgiveness of sins through baptism in His name (cf. Lk 24:47) and to bring them to complete submission to Christ through the teaching of His commands. The church is to carry out this work with the abidance of the Lord's continuing presence until the end of the age. Therefore, he who baptizes does so by the authority of Christ and he who receives baptism finds forgiveness on account of Christ's authority. The charge to baptize is so integral to the great commission that rejecting it would be tantamount to rejecting the Lord's command. Thus, the New Testament baptism is instituted by none other than Christ Himself.

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<sup>69</sup> H. Schieber, "The Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel." *TD 27* (1979): 155–58. \_\_\_\_\_. "Konzentrik im Matthäusechluss: Ein form- und gattungskritischer Versuch zu Mt 28,16–20." *Kairos* 19 (1977): 286–307.

b. Baptizing is part of disciple-making

The commission consists of an imperative, μαθητεύσατε (“make disciples”), followed by two participles βαπτίζοντες, (“baptizing”) and διδάσκοντες (“teaching”). Making disciples involves baptizing. Subsequently, the church is to teach all that the Lord has commanded to those who are baptized. The process of conversion necessarily involves baptizing. If a person wishes to become a disciple of Christ, he is to be baptized. Therefore, baptism is not a good work that follows conversion, but is key to conversion. That is why “baptizing them” (v. 19) is distinguished from “teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you” (v. 20). Baptism is required in becoming the Lord’s disciple, whereas observing all things the Lord has commanded is expected once converted.

c. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

The Lord stipulates that the disciples are to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. εἰς τὸ ὄνομα (“into the name of”), is an expression that indicates belonging to or submitting to someone. Being baptized is the process by which the believer fully surrenders to the ownership and authority of the Father who chose us and gave birth to us (Eph 1:1–8; Jas 1:17, 18; 1Pet 1:3); of the Son through whose blood we have received the propitiation for our sins (1Jn 1:7; 4:10; Gal 2:20); and of the Holy Spirit, who bears witness that we are children of God (Rom 8:16).

The Lord’s command to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit gives us an insight into the nature and significance of baptism. However, it is not meant to be a baptismal formula, i.e., “Thus you shall say verbatim when you baptize, ‘I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’” Several key considerations support this understanding:

- i. The phrase, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” describes whom the name belongs to but does not spell out what that name is. The fact that ὄνομα (“name”) is a singular noun indicates that there is but one

name, and that “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are not names. When the incarnate Christ called God His Father and Himself the Son, He was identifying His relationship to the eternal God, not using “Father” or “Son” as names. God has only one name, which is “Jesus.” Jesus is the name of the Father which the Father also gave to the Son, for in His prayer the Lord Jesus said to the Father, “Protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me” (Jn 17:11 NIV). “Jesus” is also the name of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7; Gal 4:6; Jn 14:15–20) as well as that of the Father (Mt 14:23; cf. Lk 12:12; Jn 14:23).

- ii. The Lord does not spell out what the name is because He is not giving the disciples a baptismal formula. However, the context does indicate that the name is none other than His own name. Christ first provides the basis for making disciples and baptizing, i.e., that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. Since baptism is founded on the authority of Christ, it naturally follows that baptism should be administered in His name. Baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is baptizing in Jesus’ name.
- iii. The Lord Jesus told the disciples that He had many things to say to them, but they could not bear them at that time. But when the Spirit of truth has come, He would guide them into all truths. After the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the apostles understood through the Spirit’s guidance that the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is in fact Jesus. For this reason, they commanded the converts to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). In obedience to the Lord’s commission to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the apostles consistently baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5).



# Mark 1:1–11

- 1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*
- 2 *As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.”*
- 3 *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’”*
- 4 *John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*
- 5 *Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*
- 6 *Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*
- 7 *And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*
- 8 *I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*
- 9 *It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*
- 10 *And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.*
- 11 *Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. John’s appearance
  - i. As written in the Prophets, John came as a messenger of God to prepare the way of the Lord.
- b. John’s baptism and preaching
  - i. John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins

- ii. John preached about the coming of the mightier One
- iii. Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit
- c. Baptism of Jesus
  - i. “Baptized into Jordan” (ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην) supports immersion and excludes other forms of baptism
  - ii. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and the voice from heaven declared Jesus as the Son of God

## 2. SETTING

Mark does not include the infancy and childhood of Jesus, but begins with the appearance of John. He introduces the coming of John with the title, “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (v. 1), placing the ministry of John as part of the good news that would be fulfilled in Jesus. The appearance of Jesus according to John’s preaching and the heavenly signs after His baptism firmly establish the identity of Jesus as the mightier One and the son of God.

## 3. STRUCTURE

Within the first section of this passage (vv. 1–8), we see a parallel between the prophetic words concerning the coming of the messenger (vv. 1–3) and the activities of John the Baptist (vv. 4–8), which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. John prepared the way of the Lord by preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (vv. 4–5) and proclaiming the One who was to come after him (vv. 7–8).

The second section (vv. 9–11), which continues the first, records Jesus coming to be baptized by John. Jesus’ baptism served as the occasion for the testimony from heaven.

## 4. COMMENTARY

- a. John’s appearance
  - i. Nature of John’s baptism

The first verse opens with “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” What constitutes the beginning of the gospel is explained by the next two verses. “As it is written” (v. 2) indicates that the quotations of the words of the prophets are now fulfilled as the good news of Jesus Christ has begun. In other words, John’s baptizing ministry was the starting point of the gospel, since the sole purpose of his ministry was to prepare the people to receive Christ. This is consistent with other New Testament passages about the role of John (Acts 1:22; 10:37; Mt 11:22). Therefore, the baptism that John preached and administered belonged not to the ablutions of the Old Testament but to the new era of salvation that Christ had come to fulfill.

ii. Purpose of John’s baptism

The quotations from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, fulfilled now by John the Baptist, help us understand the purpose of John’s ministry. John was a messenger of God whose mission was to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight through his preaching and baptism. By calling the people to repentance, John turned the hearts of the people back to God, making them ready for the coming of the Son of God.

b. John’s baptism and preaching

Baptism characterized John’s ministry. He preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. In response, “all the land of Judea and those from Jerusalem” (v. 5) went out to him and were baptized in the Jordan River.

A “baptism of repentance” calls for a new life and is accompanied by a conversion of the heart and conduct (see commentary on Matthew 3:1-17). Therefore, as the people went out to John to be baptized, they confessed their sins. Through the baptism of repentance, the people’s hearts were made ready for the coming of the Lord.

The baptism of repentance was “for the remission of sins” (v. 4). εἰς (“for”) connotes purpose and result. According to the law of God, a sinner who turns from his sins shall live, and

his transgressions are forgiven (Ezek 18:21, 22). Therefore, the baptism of John, if accompanied by true repentance, resulted in the remission of sins by God.

Could there have been the remission of sins prior to the coming of Jesus? Was John's baptism truly effective in removing sins? The effect of the remission of sins through John's baptism is akin to that through Old Testament sacrifices. In itself, the blood of animals is ineffective in purifying the conscience (Heb 10:1-4). But, according to God's words, the sins of the one bringing the sacrifice would be forgiven through the atonement afforded by the sacrifice (cf. Lev 4:31, 35). This promised forgiveness of sin would eventually be fulfilled when Christ offered Himself as the sacrifice of atonement. Thus, the effect of the remission of sins in the sacrifices was a promised effect. By the promise of God and through the faith of the person offering the sacrifice according to God's stipulations, the sinner received the promise of forgiveness that would be realized when Christ comes (Heb 11:39). Those who submitted to John's baptism in fact submitted to God. Similar to those who offered sacrifices in the Old Testament by faith, those who received baptism with faith also received the promise of the remission of sins. This remission of sins was ultimately to be paid for by the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God. In this sense, "for the remission of sins" (v. 4) suggests that John's baptism of repentance was effective in so far as it led the people to Christ, the source of remission of sins (cf. Acts 19:4).

- c. "One ... who is mightier than I" (v. 7)

John's baptism was not an end in itself. In addition to baptizing and calling the people to repentance, John further proclaimed the One who was to come after him. He would be mightier than John, to the extent that John would be unworthy to offer Him even the most menial service.

John contrasted his baptism, a baptism with water, with the baptism of the Holy Spirit that the mightier One was to perform. The pouring out of God's Spirit upon His people was a promise of God in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:26, 27; 37:14; Joel 2:28, 29). John proclaimed that the One

after him would bring about the fulfillment of this eschatological promise. This promise came true when the Lord poured out the promised Holy Spirit upon believers after His ascension. According to the Lord's own words, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that John preached (Acts 1:4–8; 11:15, 16).

#### d. Jesus' baptism

The narrative now shifts its focus to Jesus and records Jesus' arrival and baptism. He came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

The phrase ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην (“was baptized into the Jordan”), provides very clear evidence for immersion as the correct form of baptism. βαπτίζω normally means “to dip or immerse.” In his discussion on the meaning of the verb “to baptize,” Howard Marshall argues that since the word βαπτίζω is a technical term describing a ritual action, we cannot simply take its literal definition. He concludes that the term also includes affusion, drenching, or pouring.<sup>70</sup> However, as we see in Mark's baptism narrative, ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς can only mean “was immersed into.” The preposition εἰς (“into”) following the passive verb ἐβαπτίσθη, excludes all other forms. “Poured into,” “drenched into,” or “sprinkled into” simply would not work.

Verse 10 further confirms that Jesus was immersed in the Jordan. It describes Jesus as “coming up from the water” (ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος). The Greek preposition ἐκ (out of), used in a spatial sense, connotes the way out from the inside of an object. That Jesus came up out of the water requires that He had first entered fully into the water.

In the phrase ἐβαπτίσθη ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου (“baptized... by John”), the passive verb, ἐβαπτίσθη, and the preposition ὑπὸ with the genitive indicate that John was not merely a witness of the baptism but also the agent who performed the baptism.

Mark does not address the question of why Jesus had to receive John's baptism of repentance. Unlike Matthew, he does

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<sup>70</sup> Howard Marshall, “The Meaning of the Verb ‘Baptize,’” in *Dimensions of Baptism*, vol. 234 of *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 8–24.

not record John's reluctance and Jesus' response. However, the testimony from heaven after Jesus' baptism clearly shows that Jesus' baptism was unique.

Immediately, coming up from the water, Jesus saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. See commentary on Matthew 3:16 for an explanation of the significance of this vision.

Then a voice came from heaven, saying "You are My beloved<sup>71</sup> Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 11). God openly declared that He was God's beloved Son, thus revealing to Israel the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the specially chosen and beloved of God.

"in you I am well pleased" (ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα), was further testimony of divine favor. εὐδόκησα is in the aorist active indicative, which suggests that God was particularly pleased with what Jesus had done, i.e., His submission to His will by receiving John's baptism.

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71 "Beloved," ἀγαπητός, may also be translated "only"; see Gen 22:2,12,16 LXX

## Mark 16:14–18

- 14 *Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.*
- 15 *And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*
- 16 *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*
- 17 *And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;*
- 18 *they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The passage is in a disputed portion of biblical text
- b. Baptism is closely tied to faith
- c. Baptism, coupled with faith, is necessary for salvation

### 2. SETTING

After His crucifixion, Jesus Christ resurrected on the third day, the first day of the week. He appeared to the eleven disciples and entrusted to them the great commission to preach the gospel. The commission is all-encompassing in its scope, in that the disciples are to go into “all the world” and to preach to “every creature” (v. 15). Following the commission proper is the statement about the two possible responses to the gospel and their respective results.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Canonicity of the passage

The concluding passage of the Gospel of Mark is a disputed portion of biblical text. Mark 16:9–20 appears in the Textus Receptus version of the Greek New Testament from which the King James Version was translated. However, this passage is absent in the earliest found codices of the New Testament (i.e., Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus). Hence, many scholars claim that Mark 16:9–20 is not canonical but was added to soften the apparent abrupt ending at verse 8.

It is not our present task to determine the canonicity of this passage. Regardless of its canonicity, the passage's conclusion concerning baptism is entirely consistent with other baptismal passages. Therefore, the question of its canonicity does not detract from what other parts of the Scripture state about baptism. We will proceed on the assumption that the text is original and examine how it supports the necessity of baptism.

#### b. Baptism and faith

When offering the promise of salvation, the Lord speaks of the necessity of faith and baptism. Faith and baptism are so closely connected that they are inseparable. In Greek, a single definite article ὁ (“the one who”) groups πιστεύσας (“believes”) and βαπτισθεῖς (“is baptized”) together. Thus, ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεῖς (“he who believes and is baptized”) is one unit. As far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, there are only two categories of people with respect to their responses to the gospel: those who believe and are baptized and those who do not believe. The first category consists of believers and the latter unbelievers. Believing the Lord Jesus but not receiving baptism is not one of the options. Faith underlies baptism, and baptism follows faith. A person who receives baptism must also accept the Lord Jesus Christ with faith in order to be saved. On the other hand, a person who has faith in Jesus Christ ought to be baptized into Christ.

The pairing of faith and baptism is evident in the New Testament teachings about baptism (Gal 3:26, 27; Col 2:11, 12)



and in the examples in Acts (Acts 2:36–38; 10:42–48; 16:29–33; 19:4, 5). Furthermore, the gifts of grace received through faith, such as forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification, regeneration, union with Christ, and being sons of God, are also received through baptism. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that baptism is here linked so intimately with faith as a prerequisite for salvation.

c. Baptism is necessary for salvation

The two conditions for salvation are faith and baptism. Thus, the verse states that “he who believes *and* is baptized” (v. 16; emphasis added) will be saved. To receive salvation, it is necessary to believe and be baptized.

The second part of the condition—baptism—has often been treated as a non-requirement by those who view belief as the only condition for salvation. According to this view, baptism is only a public demonstration of belief and has no saving effect. Adherents of this view often cite the second portion of verse 16: “but he who does not believe will be condemned.” The rationale is that since unbelief is the only condition for condemnation, whether a person is baptized determines neither his salvation nor his condemnation.

To respond to such an interpretation, we need to first understand why baptism is not included in the second part of the verse. Since faith and baptism are intimately connected, receiving baptism presupposes belief. Belief, on the other hand, necessarily precedes baptism and prepares one to be baptized. Stating “he who does not believe and is not baptized” would be redundant. If one does not believe in the first place, the necessity of baptism would be irrelevant, and he stands condemned already. This is why the second half of the verse only mentions the first part of the condition (belief) that would logically precede the next (baptism).

The fact that baptism is out of the question for a person who does not believe once again highlights the close conjunction of faith and baptism. Without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no baptism to speak of. Therefore, the omission of baptism

in the second part of the statement does not imply that it is unnecessary or unimportant. Rather, it indicates that baptism naturally follows belief. If anyone claims to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ but rejects baptism into His name, his claim of faith is questionable.

Finally, it is important to ask why the Lord mentions baptism at all if it is unnecessary for salvation. If baptism were not essential to salvation, saying “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” (v. 16) would be misleading. It would be akin to a statement such as “he who believes and performs signs will be saved.” The natural reading of such a statement would certainly lead one to conclude that performing signs is necessary for salvation. Although the Lord promises in verses 17 and 18 that signs will follow those believe, performing signs is not part of the condition for salvation and is therefore not included in verse 16. Instead of going without saying that baptism should follow belief, the fact that the Lord specifically mentions baptism in connection with faith shows its vital importance to salvation. Consequently, the argument that baptism is mentioned not as a necessity for salvation but simply as an expression of belief is not warranted by this passage.

## Luke 3:1–22

- 1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,
- 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.
- 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,
- 4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.
- 5 Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth;
- 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "
- 7 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
- 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
- 9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."
- 10 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"
- 11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."
- 12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"
- 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."
- 14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."
- 15 Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about

- John, whether he was the Christ or not,*
- 16 *John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*
- 17 *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."*
- 18 *And with many other exhortations he preached to the people.*
- 19 *But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,*
- 20 *also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.*
- 21 *When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.*
- 22 *And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."*

## **1. KEY POINTS**

- a. The ministry of John
  - i. John's baptism, coupled with repentance, brought the remission of sins and prepared the people to receive Christ
  - ii. Baptism must be accompanied by a life that reflects repentance
  - iii. One must bear the fruits of righteousness to escape God's coming wrath
- b. John's proclamation of Christ
  - i. John preached that One mightier than him was coming
  - ii. The mightier One would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire
- c. The baptism of Jesus
  - i. Jesus identified with the people since He was baptized along with them
  - ii. The descent of the Holy Spirit and voice from heaven revealed that Jesus was the Son of God as well as anointed Jesus for ministry

## 2. SETTING

Luke chapter 1 records the birth of John and predictions about His ministry. The chapter ends with the statement that John “was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Lk 1:80). The current passage returns to the wilderness scene and depicts John preaching and baptizing according to his divine commission.

The account of Jesus’ baptism, after which Jesus was announced as the Son of God, is linked to the subsequent passages on Jesus’ genealogy and temptation, both of which continue the theme of Jesus’ divine sonship. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus further links this narrative to references to the Holy Spirit in the next chapter (Lk 4:1, 18).

## 3. STRUCTURE

Luke separates John’s ministry (vv. 1–20) and Jesus’ baptism (vv. 21–22) into two distinct narratives. By inserting the imprisonment of John (vv. 19–20), Luke first brings the story of John’s ministry to a close before shifting his focus to Jesus.

In his account of John’s ministry, Luke introduces John as the prophet of God (vv. 1–6). Then he describes John’s baptizing and preaching activities as well as the content of his message (vv. 7–18). Finally, he concludes by recording Herod’s opposition, which led to John’s imprisonment (vv. 19–20).

The narrative of the heavenly revelation depicts Jesus’ prayer after baptism (v. 21a), followed by three actions expressed by the infinitive verbs “to be opened” (ἀνεψχθῆναι), “to descend” (καταβῆναι), and “to become” (γενέσθαι):

1. Opening of heaven (v. 21b)
2. Descent of the Holy Spirit (v. 22a)
3. Speaking of the voice from heaven (v. 22b)

#### 4. COMMENTARY

##### a. Commissioning of John

According to Zechariah's prophecy, John would become the prophet of the Highest (Lk 1:76). Here, Luke introduces John as a prophet of God in a manner reminiscent of the calling of the Old Testament prophets—through the use of the words “the word of God came to John” (v. 2) and setting the call in a historical context (cf. Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3; Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1).

The work of John the Baptist was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy about the preparation of the way of the Lord. The quotation of Isaiah 40:3–5 provides an insight into the ministry of John. The preparatory mission of John was a necessary precursor in the revelation of God's salvation.

##### b. John's baptism

In response to his call, John went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching “a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (v. 3; See comments on Mark 1 for the meaning of this term). Baptism, accompanied by repentance and resulting in the remission of sins, was part of John's preparatory ministry in expectation of the Messiah. By receiving baptism and turning back to God, the people's hearts were made ready for the coming of Christ.

##### c. John's message

The content of John's preaching consists of: warning about the coming judgment (vv. 7–9), practical instructions on how to bear good fruits in keeping with repentance (vv. 10–14), and the announcement of the coming of the mightier One (vv. 15–17).

##### i. Repentance and judgment

John exhorted the people who came to be baptized to bear fruits worthy of repentance in order to flee from the wrath to come. All three of the groups who came to John asked the same question: “What shall we do?” In response, John taught them to practice love and compassion toward others in their daily lives.

Clearly, being baptized alone was insufficient. Personal righteousness exhibited in daily conduct was necessary in order to escape the coming wrath. At the same time, the stress on ethics does not render baptism meaningless. Baptism was closely connected with repentance and remission of sins. By accepting John's baptism, the people confessed their sins and submitted to the way of righteousness God demands. Baptism received with a repentant heart resulted in the remission of sins, and practicing God's ethical requirements would spare the individual of the impending judgment.

ii. The mightier One

Eagerly expecting the Messiah, the people wondered if John was the Christ, the Anointed One of God. John responded by pointing them to the coming of "One mightier than I" (v. 16), who was so far greater that John was not even fit to loose His sandal strap. He contrasted his baptism with water with the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, which the Christ would perform. (See comments on Matthew 3:1-17 for the meaning of "baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.")

John's baptism, therefore, paved the way for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. It turned the people to God so that they would be ready to receive the regeneration of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, finally resulting in acceptance by God. On the other hand, those who rejected the baptism and teachings of John would have to face the fire of judgment that the mightier One would bring upon the unrepentant.

d. Jesus' baptism and the testimony from heaven

Luke's account focuses on the events after Jesus' baptism rather than on His baptism itself. We can see in Luke's description that Jesus' baptism was placed side by side with the people's baptism: "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized" (v. 21). The Christ, the One mightier than John, did not separate Himself from the people. Instead, He identified with them and submitted to the baptism of John just as the people did. Likewise, His prayer, which

indicated His humanity, reinforced His identification with man.

The events after Jesus' baptism demonstrated His unique status to the people. They testified that He was the Christ, the One mightier than John who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (cf. Jn 1:29–34; see also comments on Matthew 3:1–17 for the significance of these events). Furthermore, the divine revelation can be viewed as a commission and inauguration for the ministry that Jesus was about to embark. As recorded in later passages in Luke, the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus served as a mark of divine call and guidance (Lk 4:1, 14, 18–21; Acts 10:38). God's declaration that Jesus was the beloved Son also directed the people to heed the words and works of God's own Son (cf. Lk 9:35; 20:13).



## Luke 7:24–30

- 24 *When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?*
- 25 *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts.*
- 26 *But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.*
- 27 *This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'*
- 28 *For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."*
- 29 *And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.*
- 30 *But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. John the Baptist was the greatest prophet in history
- b. The kingdom of God, brought by Jesus' arrival, surpassed anything history had witnessed
- c. The baptism of John
  - i. Receiving John's baptism was inseparable from receiving John and his message
  - ii. Receiving John's baptism meant submitting to God's will

## 2. SETTING

John had sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Coming One. In response, Jesus told them to report to John the works He was doing. Jesus' ministry and miraculous signs sufficiently demonstrated that He was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. In the current passage of study, Jesus spoke to the multitudes about John. A person's attitude toward John, and subsequently Jesus, showed whether he was aligned with or opposed to God's will.

## 3. COMMENTARY

Receiving John's baptism leads to receiving Jesus

### a. Jesus' affirmation of John

By repeating the question "What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" (v. 24) Jesus asked the people to reflect on the meaning of the widespread ministry of John the Baptist, which had drawn a great number of people into the wilderness to be baptized. Jesus confirmed the popular notion that John was a prophet and further stated that he was more than a prophet. Quoting Malachi's prophecy (cf. Mal 3:1; 4:5), Jesus asserted that John was the prophet Elijah, the messenger whom God sent to prepare the way of the Lord before His coming (cf. Mt 11:14; 17:10–13). In fact, no other prophet was greater than John.

Yet, according to Jesus, even the least in the kingdom of God is greater than the greatest prophet of all time. This means that the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus surpassed even the greatest witnessed by mankind. The coming of the Messiah marked the beginning of an unprecedented era in God's redemptive plan.

### b. Significance of receiving John's baptism

The passage draws a sharp contrast between those "having been baptized" (βαπτισθέντες) and those "not having been baptized" (μὴ βαπτισθέντες). In view of John's role as the herald of the kingdom of God, whether a person submitted to or rejected John's message and baptism became all the more

significant. Therefore, when all the people who had been baptized by John, including the tax collectors, heard what Jesus said about John, they justified God.<sup>72</sup> In other words, they acknowledged that God's purpose and deeds are right. By receiving the baptism of John, they aligned themselves with God's purpose. But the Pharisees and lawyers who had not been baptized by John "rejected the will of God for themselves" (v. 30).

Since John's baptism was ordained by God (cf. Lk 20:4), acceptance or rejection of John's baptism was equivalent to acceptance or rejection of God's will. John's baptism was inseparable from his message of repentance, as Luke made no distinction between being baptized with John's baptism and accepting John as a prophet of God. As we learn from this passage, the Pharisees' and lawyers' refusal to be baptized by John indicated their rejection of God's will. A person could not claim to submit to God's purpose but reject baptism. Submission to God invariably involved receiving the baptism from heaven. This underscores the importance of baptism in conversion and submission to God.

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72 "Justify," δικαιώω, means "show justice," "vindicate," or "prove to be right." William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 249

## John 1:19–34

- 19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"
- 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."
- 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."
- 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"
- 23 He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord,"' as the prophet Isaiah said."
- 24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.
- 25 And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"
- 26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.
- 27 It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."
- 28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
- 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
- 30 This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'
- 31 I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."
- 32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.
- 33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'
- 34 And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. John's role was to make straight the way of the Lord
- b. John baptized with water in order that Jesus should be revealed to Israel
- c. God revealed Jesus' identity to John when the Holy Spirit descended and remained on Jesus
- d. John bore witness that Jesus was:
  - i. The Lamb of God
  - ii. Before John and greater than John
  - iii. He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit
  - iv. The Son of God

## 2. SETTING

In the prologue of this Gospel, the author introduced Jesus as the Word who became flesh and the light that came into the world. He brings John the Baptist into the scene to be the first witness for Jesus. Starting from this passage, which follows the prologue, the author shifts from doctrinal presentation to a series of narratives. He expands on the testimony of John the Baptist, who directed the people's attention to Jesus and declared that He was indeed the incarnate Word, the Son of God.

## 3. STRUCTURE

This passage is divided into two sections. The first section (vv. 19–28) records the dialogue between John and the delegation from Jerusalem. The second section begins with the words “the next day” (v. 29), a time indicator that appears repeatedly in the rest of the narratives (cf. Jn 1:35, 43, 2:1). In this section, when he saw Jesus coming toward him, we see the Baptist's explicit announcement of who Jesus was.

#### 4. COMMENTARY

##### a. John's witness to the religious leaders (vv. 19–28)

John was baptizing in Bethany beyond the Jordan. According to parallel accounts, great multitudes came out to John to be baptized. The great impact of John's ministry attracted the attention of the Jews and religious authorities in Jerusalem. Puzzled by John and his baptizing activities, the priests, Levites, and representatives from the Pharisees came to inquire of John's identity. They asked him, "Who are you?" (v. 19) With a series of negatives, John denied that he was the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet.<sup>73</sup> When pressed further for his identity, John quoted the words of Isaiah and stated that he was the voice in the wilderness. John's mission was to make straight the way of the Lord.

If John was not any of the great figures prophesied in the Scriptures, the inquirers wanted to know, then why did he baptize? In response, John pointed out the ultimate purpose of his baptism, which was to prepare for the coming of Him who was far greater than John, whom the people did not know. John's baptism was a baptism with water, but the One who was coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit (v. 33).<sup>74</sup>

##### b. John's witness to the people (vv. 29–34)

When John saw Jesus coming toward him, he proclaimed that He was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (v. 29). The allusion is to the Pascal lamb and the Messiah in Isaiah 53:7, who is described as a lamb led to the slaughter.

In reference to his earlier testimony (v. 27), John spoke of Jesus' superior status. Although Jesus came after John, he had taken on a greater role than John ("preferred before me").<sup>75</sup> The reason was that Jesus had in fact existed before him ("for He was before me").

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73 "The Prophet" was a reference to Deut 18:15–18.

74 See comments on Matthew 3:1–17 for the meaning of baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

75 "Has become in front of me," ἐμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν

John states the goal of his baptizing ministry very clearly—that Jesus, the Lamb of God, may be revealed to Israel.<sup>76</sup> By awakening the people’s awareness of their sins and their need for repentance and forgiveness, John heightened their expectation of the coming of the Christ.

At first, John did not know the identity of the One coming after him. But God had given him a sign in advance: “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (v. 33). This sign was fulfilled after Jesus’ baptism. The heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended and remained on Jesus (cf. Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:21, 22). Thus, through John’s baptism, Jesus was revealed to Israel. John was the witness of this divine revelation and thus testified that Jesus was the Son of God.

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<sup>76</sup> The Greek construction places the ἵνα (“in order that”) clause first, emphasizing the purpose of John’s baptism. The words “on account of this” (διὰ τοῦτο) also reinforce this point

## John 3:1–15

- 1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.
- 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”
- 3 Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”
- 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”
- 5 Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.
- 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’
- 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
- 9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”
- 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?
- 11 “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.
- 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?
- 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.
- 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
- 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

(New Revised Standard Version)



## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Spiritual birth involves water and Spirit (v. 5)
- b. Spiritual birth is necessary for salvation (vv. 3, 5)
- c. Spiritual birth is an earthly experience with a heavenly witness (vv. 11–12)
- d. Spiritual birth is based on faith in the Son of God (vv. 13–15)

## 2. SETTING

In John 2:23–25, we read of men who believed in Jesus but whose faith was questionable. Jesus did not entrust Himself to such men because He knew all men, and had no need for anyone to bear witness concerning a man, for He knew what was in man. Immediately following, the writer introduces Nicodemus as a “man of the Pharisees” (v. 1) to hint at the fact that Nicodemus would not fully understand Jesus’ teaching.

This begins Jesus’ conversation with the man Nicodemus. In that conversation, Jesus mentioned “kingdom of God” (v. 3, 5) twice, suggesting that Nicodemus came to Jesus seeking answers about God’s kingdom. The Jewish rulers, including Nicodemus, were highly concerned with the re-gathering of God’s people and the establishment of God’s kingdom, thought they only had an earthly vision (cf. Jn 11:47–53). Nicodemus, being one of them, initially represented those who were in darkness, like those in John 2:24, 25, who could not truly “know” or “receive” the witness of Christ.

Nicodemus admitted that Jesus must have come from God (v. 2); yet, he could not understand or receive Jesus’ witness (vv. 10, 11). Therefore, Jesus chided Nicodemus, saying, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (v. 10).

## 3. STRUCTURE

The main teachings in this passage can be summarized by Jesus’ three “very truly” statements. These three statements provide the basic outline of Jesus’ teachings in this passage:

- a. We must be born from above to see God's kingdom (v. 3)
- b. We must be born of water and Spirit to enter God's kingdom (v. 5)
- c. We must receive the witness of the Son of God who fully declares God (v. 11; cf. Jn 1:18)

#### 4. COMMENTARY

##### a. Born of water and Spirit

- i. The spiritual births in this passage consist of being born of water and spirit

Jesus mentions the word "born" throughout the passage; however, all refer to one spiritual birth. Throughout the passage, we can see several specific expressions of the one spiritual birth:

- "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." (v. 3)
- "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." (v. 5)
- "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." (v. 6)
- "Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above'" (v. 7)
- "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (v. 8)

The identical structures in verse 3 and verse 5 show that to be "born from above" (v. 3) is to be "born of water and the Spirit" (v. 5). Jesus then further elaborates with the phrase "born of the Spirit" (vv. 6, 8), which is synonymous with "born from above" (v. 7). From the foregoing, we can conclude that being "born from above" (v. 3), "born of water and the Spirit" (v. 5), and "born of the Spirit" (v. 6, 8) are one and the same.

Jesus' first important statement was that unless one is "born from above" (v. 3), one cannot enter the kingdom of God. When Nicodemus could not understand the meaning of this, Jesus explained this as being "born out of water and spirit" (v. 5).

One interpretation of John 3:5 views "water" as a figure of speech for natural birth, i.e., "water" refers to the embryonic fluid in the mother's womb. According to this interpretation, Jesus teaches that a person not only must be born physically, but also must also be born spiritually. There are some serious flaws with this interpretation:

1. The preposition ἐξ ("out of"), governs both "water and Spirit" (v. 5) and groups the two into one thought. The concept of "not only water but also Spirit" cannot be found here. Thus, "out of water and Spirit" shows that "water and spirit" are intimately woven together as one unit rather than juxtaposed against one another.
2. There was no reason for Jesus to refer to natural birth. Jesus was not saying: "Unless one is born naturally and spiritually he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Such a thought would be just as clearly expressed with "unless one is born of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." For Jesus to refer to natural birth here only adds confusion, in addition to it being odd for Jesus to utilize "water" to refer to physical birth, which is not found anywhere else in the Scriptures.
3. If Jesus had natural birth in mind, He would probably have used the standard Jewish phrase "born of a woman" (Mt 11:11; Gal 4:4).<sup>77</sup>

Another common interpretation of John 3:5 argues that "water" is synonymous with "Spirit." The rationale for this argument is that καὶ ("and/also") is explanatory, i.e., "water, even Spirit" or "water, namely Spirit." Adherents of this position point out that Jesus never mentioned "water" again

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<sup>77</sup> John E. Morgan-Wayne, "References to Baptism in the Fourth Gospel," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the church*, vol. 171 of *Journal for the study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, ed. Stanley Porter and Anthony R. Cross, (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 122.

after verse 5, but only spoke of being “born of the Spirit.” In support of this view, Karl Barth cites examples from John such as “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11:25), saying that Christ is the resurrection precisely because He is the life.<sup>78</sup> Jesus’ discussion of “living water” in John 7:38, 39, which refers to the Holy Spirit, is also frequently cited to support the idea that “born of water and spirit” simply means “born of Spirit.”

This interpretation does not stand based on the following reasons:

1. When Jesus used the term “living water” in John 7:38, 39, the author specifically clarifies that “living water” referred to the Spirit. In John 3:5, however, Jesus used the term “water” and the author does not make any further clarification. Another distinction is that in 7:38, Jesus used “living” to qualify “water” whereas in 3:5 “water” is unqualified. There are thus sufficient distinctions between the two sections of the Bible to merit caution in equating “born of water and spirit” simply with “born of Spirit.”
2. In John 11:25, “resurrection and life” may be similar, but both are terms that can be clearly understood even separately. The same is true of “water and Spirit” because “water” can be understood separately from “Spirit.” Furthermore, Jesus is not using “life” to explain “resurrection” the way that He explained the Holy Spirit with living water in John 7:38, 39. In other words, although “water” and “Spirit” are intimately joined, they express different aspects of the one birth that cannot be fully expressed with “Spirit” alone.
3. To contend that “water” is essentially the same as “Spirit” eliminates “water” from the equation entirely. If that were Jesus’ intention, Jesus could have simply stated: “unless one is born of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” and it would have been sufficiently clear.

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78 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956–75), 121.

Inserting “water,” when all He meant to say was “Spirit,” would only cause undue confusion.

ii. Water is a reference to baptism

There is strong Biblical evidence that the word “water” refers to baptism:

1. In the Gospel of John, “water” is mentioned approximately 21 times. Of these, at least four references clearly refer to water baptism (Jn 1:26, 31, 33; 3:23). All of these references occur within the first three chapters of the Gospel and John 3:5 is well within this context. Three of the references are clearly set in the context of Jesus’ baptism.
2. In John 3:22–30, the passage following Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus, we are told that Jesus remained with his disciples in Judea and baptized. At the same time, John also was baptizing in Aenon “because there was much water there” (Jn 3:23). The One who spoke of the need to be born of water and Spirit now baptized the multitude. Therefore, it is appropriate to interpret “water” as baptism.
3. After the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:44–48, Peter immediately understood that the Gentiles were also worthy to receive the “water.” Specifically, when Peter saw the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, he said, “Can anyone forbid *water*, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit?” (Acts 10:47; emphasis added). So Peter commanded that the Gentiles be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:47, 48). From the context of the passage, we are certain that “water” here refers to baptism. We should note that Peter did not use “water” to allude to the Holy Spirit. Rather, Peter understood receiving the Holy Spirit and baptism as two distinct events that share an intimate relationship. Therefore, even though the Gentiles had received

the Holy Spirit, Peter was still concerned that they be baptized with water.

4. Acts 22:16 tells us baptism is to “wash away your sins.” If “washing” takes place in baptism, as attested in Acts 22:16, “the washing of regeneration” in Titus 3:5 can also be understood as a reference to a baptismal “washing.” This means that both John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 speak of baptism, which results in the spiritual birth spoken of in John 3:1–15.
5. In 1 Peter 3:20, 21, Peter explains that the water through which Noah and his household were saved finds its correspondence in the baptism that now saves believers. Utilizing the description of the eight souls that were “saved through water,” Peter links “water” to baptism and emphasizes baptism’s saving effect. Just as baptism is for the purpose of salvation (Mk 16:16), being “born of water and Spirit” is the means of entering God’s kingdom. When we understand the foregoing connections between baptism and salvation, it is not very difficult to see that the “water” in John 3:5 is an allusion to water baptism.

Why then did Jesus not plainly say, “unless one is born of baptism and the Spirit” if this is what He intended?

First, we note that the meaning of Jesus’ words is hidden from Nicodemus and that they are conversing on very different planes. Therefore, by not speak plainly of water as baptism, the obscurity of His language not only applies to the word “water” but also to the entire discourse with Nicodemus.

Secondly, were Jesus to use the word “baptism,” it would have emphasized the administration of the baptismal rite or its outward action, whereas “water and Spirit” describes the very nature and essence of what it means to be born from above. That being the case, Jesus’ use of “water and Spirit” alludes to both the earthly (water) and heavenly (Spirit)

dimensions of baptism. Thus, Jesus' use of the word "water" rather than "baptism" is quite appropriate in the context.

iii. Water and Spirit are intimately related

The pairing of "water and Spirit" found in John 3:5 shows that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in a person's spiritual birth. The Spirit is the witness at baptism and brings about the effect of the forgiveness of sins (1Jn 5:7; Jn 20:21–23; cf. Jn 1:32–34). It is in Him that we are baptized into one body (1Cor 12:13). Furthermore, the Spirit dwells in the individual believer to empower him to lead a new life (Rom 8:1–16; 1Thess 2:13; Tit 3:5, 6). We may thus conclude that the washing of water in baptism together with the work of the promised Holy Spirit throughout the believer's life constitute what it means to be "born of the Spirit" as spoken of in John 3:6, 8. Thus, our birth of both "water" and "Spirit" are integral parts of our spiritual birth.

b. Baptism and salvation

If it is necessary to be "born of water and spirit" to enter God's kingdom, and if "water" is an allusion to baptism in John 3:5, that verse leads to the conclusion that baptism is necessary to enter God's kingdom. This is consistent with other biblical passages that teach of the close relationship between baptism and salvation (Mk 16:16; 1Pet 3:21).

Why is baptism so essential to our salvation? Being born from above entails receiving a new life from God, i.e. being "born of God" (Jn 1:12f). This new life is only possible because the blood of Jesus Christ, in baptism, washes away a believer's sins; the old man is thereby crucified and buried with Christ only to rise once more to newness of life (Rom 6:3–7; Col 2:11). Thus, it is through baptism that we are raised with Christ unto a new life (Col 2:12–13). The death of the old man and the resurrection of the new man are fundamental to spiritual birth.

c. Earthly experience, heavenly witness

The phrase γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν has been translated either as "born again" or "born from above." The context favors "born from above" as the preferred translation (see excursus) even

though “born again” is not excluded as a possible translation. “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v. 6). In other words, our spiritual birth must originate “from above” (v. 3), or from God. To be “born of the Spirit” is obviously not according to the will of man but of God (Jn 1:13). John 3:8, therefore, makes this concept clear by saying: “The wind [or Spirit] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” For the wind to “blow where it wishes” speaks to the sovereignty of heaven or God. Just as the wind blows where it wishes, by the Spirit’s will, one can be born from above.

While the spiritual birth in this passage has a heavenly aspect, as suggested by the words “from above,” Jesus came to earth to reveal the way of spiritual birth to us here (v. 13). Thus, to be born of water and Spirit is an earthly experience that is as real as the earthly experience of Jesus’ own baptism, which involved water and the witness of the Spirit (Jn 1:31–34). Both the Son of Man, who came down from heaven above and the heavenly Father speak and testify to what they have seen—the things of heaven (v. 11).

On our part, to be born from above, we must receive the witness from heaven by believing while on earth. The Son of Man came down (v. 13) so that He would be lifted up (v. 14), that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life (vv. 15–17).

Receiving baptism is an important part of our birth from above. It is a divine institution because it does not derive from the will of man but of the Spirit. It is an act that has the witness of the Spirit (Jn 1:32–34; Acts 10:47; 11:15–18).

After Jesus’ resurrection, the Lord commissioned His disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:18, 19). This further confirms that baptism is a divine institution. Just as John’s baptism was from heaven (Lk 20:4), the baptism Christ commanded His disciples is from heaven. We have the testimony from God Himself that the Spirit, the water, and the blood agree as one and that we can



receive eternal life through God's Son (1Jn 5:5–13). With the presence of the Holy Spirit, the blood of Jesus Christ washes away our sin and regenerates us through the water of baptism. By accepting this testimony of God in baptism, we accept the gift of eternal life given through the Son of God.

Even though spiritual birth is from above, it is not intangible; rather, it has a tangible manifestation on earth. Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (v. 12) In other words, being born from above is not beyond the realm of earthly experience, but through Christ, is something all of us can experience.

We may not know where the wind comes from or where it goes, but we are able to hear its sound (v. 8). Likewise, we may not completely be able to rationalize the spiritual effect of baptism or the work of the Holy Spirit, but we can personally experience the spiritual birth administered by the church through baptism and the visible evidence of her receiving of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:33).

#### d. Baptism and faith in the Son of God

Because the Son of God came down from heaven, today, we can be born from above. By believing in Jesus, we will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). Believing in the Son of God entails more than mere acknowledgment that Jesus is the Son of God. Faith also requires that we believe in Jesus' testimony to us (vv. 11, 12) and that we hear His voice.<sup>79</sup> In particular, this means that we heed the words of the Lord about our spiritual birth, which He clearly taught as necessary for entering God's kingdom. Through this birth from above, we receive the testimony of the Son of God by faith and obtain eternal life.

Because the Son of God has been lifted up, we may be born of water and the Spirit. In the Gospel of John, "lifted up" refers to Jesus' glorification through the way of the cross (cf. Jn

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<sup>79</sup> The phrase "you hear the sound (or "voice") of it" in John 3:8 is akin to the testimony of John the Baptist in John 3:29 about hearing the voice of the bridegroom, who is Jesus. Then, in John 5:25, Jesus speaks of the dead who hear the voice of the Son of God and will live. Thus, those who are truly blessed are those who can hear the voice of the Spirit (i.e., the Spirit's witness), which is also the voice of the Son of God who came from above.

8:28; 12:16, 23f, 28, 32f; cf. Isa 52:13). On the cross, Jesus shed His blood for our redemption. He was raised to life, and He has now been exalted to the highest. The effect of baptism is founded upon the shedding of Jesus' precious blood and is based upon the universal authority Jesus received from the Father (Mt 28:18, 19; Heb 10:19–22; Jn 5:21–27). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is an outcome of Jesus' glorification and exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33). By receiving baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus and the promised Holy Spirit from the risen Christ, we too can have eternal life in the Son of God.

From all of the above, we can see that baptism is inseparable from faith in the Son of God, who has both come down from heaven and been lifted up. Receiving baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is receiving the Son of God Himself and heeding His voice. The very meaning and effect of baptism thus center on the Lord Jesus Christ's testimony and His saving grace towards us. Faith in the Son of God, therefore, entails being baptized into Him according to His Word for regeneration, and receiving baptism in Christ's name is the concrete expression of our faith in Him.

#### 5. EXCURSUS: "BORN FROM ABOVE"

Both translations "from above" and "again" for the word *ἄνωθεν* are permissible in the New Testament, and the context helps to determine which one is meant in a particular text. In favor of the translation "born from above" for in this passage, consider the following:

- i. Although Nicodemus apparently understood Jesus' teaching concerning *γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν* ("born from above"; v. 3) as suggesting a physical rebirth (v. 4), we know that Nicodemus' understanding of Jesus' words is a poor indicator of the meaning of Jesus' words. First and foremost, Jesus Himself indicated that Nicodemus did not understand what He was saying (v. 10).

- ii. In the Gospel of John, ἀνωθεν means “above” or “heaven” in John 3:31; 19:11, and 19:23 (and perhaps is an indirect reference to God). The use of ἀνωθεν in this Gospel, therefore, seems to favor the translation “above” over “again.”
- iii. This subtle distinction between “born again” and “born from above” may seem irrelevant at first, but it is useful to our understanding of the passage because of the following reasons:
  1. In the larger context of the passage, “born from above” better clarifies than “born again” the emphasis on the verticality existing between heaven and earth (Jn 3:12–14, 27, 31), as well as what is above and what is below (Jn 3:14, 31).
  2. “Born from above” clarifies the source of our birth, which is God. In the Gospel of John, “above” can be a circumlocution for God (Jn 3:31). Thus, “born from above” means born of God (cf. Jn 1:13; 1Jn 2:29) or born of the Spirit (Jn 3:6, 8) that came from above (Jn 1:32, 33). This above-below contrast is repeatedly seen within the context of John 3:1–21 (cf. Jn 3:12–14, 27, 31).

## John 3:22–30

- 22 *After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.*
- 23 *Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.*
- 24 *For John had not yet been thrown into prison.*
- 25 *Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.*
- 26 *And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"*
- 27 *John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.*
- 28 *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'*
- 29 *He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.*
- 30 *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Jesus baptized in Judea and all went to Him
- b. Jesus' baptizing ministry indicates:
  - i. The continuation of the practice of baptism from John to Jesus
  - ii. The importance of baptism in receiving the arrival of the Messiah and His kingdom

- c. John reiterated his testimony of Jesus and His surpassing greatness

## 2. SETTING

In the opening chapter of the Gospel, John testified regarding Jesus. He witnessed that Jesus was the Lamb of God and the Son of God. Through divine revelation, John testified that Jesus was the greater One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The whole purpose of John's baptizing ministry was to reveal Jesus to Israel.

As the subsequent narratives unfold, we gain deeper insights into who Jesus is. He is the King of Israel and the way to heaven. He reveals His glory through miraculous signs. He is the temple that will be destroyed but rebuilt. He came down from heaven and will be lifted up so that those who believe in Him may have eternal life. At this point, as Jesus baptized and drew many people to Him, the author brings John the Baptist back to bear confirming testimony for Jesus one last time. Just as foretold in the beginning, Jesus would become greater because He was indeed the One for whom John had been sent to prepare the way.

## 3. COMMENTARY

### a. Jesus baptized

This account records that Jesus remained with His disciples in Judea and baptized there. We learn that John also baptized in Aenon.<sup>80</sup> This shows that John did not cease from baptizing even after Jesus began His ministry. Even more remarkable is the fact that Jesus also engaged in a baptizing ministry. Not only did Jesus not end the practice of baptism that John began, He expanded it.

In the parenthetical statement in John 4:2, the author explains that it was not Jesus Himself who baptized, but His disciples. He mentions this to point out that what the Pharisees had heard about Jesus was not entirely accurate. Regardless, Jesus

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<sup>80</sup> The location of Aenon is uncertain.

clearly authorized and commissioned His disciples to baptize. From the words of John's disciple (v. 26) and from John's rejoicing at Jesus' increasing greatness, it is evident that the baptizing ministry was associated with Jesus.

Furthermore, Jesus' baptizing ministry was even more successful than John's, for John's disciples commented that "all" were coming to Jesus (v. 26) and Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (Jn 4:1). Considering the extent of John's ministry, which was "Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan" (Mt 3:5), we conclude that the baptism Jesus commissioned was far-reaching and well-known.

The coming of Jesus and the revelation that He was the Christ did not result in the end of baptism. On the contrary, baptism continued to be administered for conversion and turning people towards God. Just as Jesus preached the same message as John—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"—He also baptized those who came to Him in repentance. Jesus' continuation and expansion of baptism is noteworthy because it indicates its crucial role in the preaching of repentance and the good news of the kingdom of God. Thus, when the Lord later commissioned the disciples to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them (Mt 28:18–20), baptism was already a widespread practice. Baptism was certainly not a new or unfamiliar ordinance although Christian baptism would later be administered in Jesus' name (cf. Acts 2:38) and take on a new level of meaning upon the Lord's resurrection and the descent of the promised Holy Spirit. Starting from John's baptism of repentance until the post-Pentecostal Christian baptism, baptism never lost its place within conversion and was widely administered alongside the proclamation of the gospel.

The power of Jesus' baptizing ministry, as mentioned in the context of chapter 3 of the Gospel, is also significant. In His discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus stressed being born from above as a necessary condition for entering the kingdom of God. This spiritual birth meant being "born of the water and the Spirit" and was given to man through the Son who came

down from heaven and would be lifted up. Immediately following the discourse, we read that Jesus, who had come to bring spiritual birth to man, was baptizing people and making disciples.

Thus we face the question of whether baptism is integral to one's faith in the Son of God and to the spiritual birth that Jesus spoke of, or a rite that should be separated from faith and spiritual birth. If baptism is a human action opposed to faith in Christ and birth from above or merely a precursor to be replaced by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then it would make sense for Jesus to stop this practice instead of administering it even more widely than John. On the other hand, if we bear in mind that the baptism that Jesus commissioned originated from heaven just as John's baptism did (cf. Mk 11:30) then it is not difficult to explain Jesus' instruction to his disciples to baptize. Furthermore, if the One from heaven engaged in a baptizing ministry while proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of heaven, it relates "water" in the preceding discourse (Jn 3:5) to baptism. Baptism, accompanied by repentance, is a necessary part of spiritual birth and a requisite for entering the kingdom of God.

b. Jesus' increasing greatness

In this passage, the author compares Jesus and His ministry to the Baptist and his ministry. This establishes a connection between the two but at the same time sets up a contrast between them. The passage records that Jesus and John baptized concurrently. Jesus' baptizing ministry affirms the baptism of John by continuing and expanding on what John had begun. At the same time, the growing ministry of Jesus compared to John's diminishing one confirms that Jesus was indeed the greater One coming after John.

We do not have much information about the dispute recorded in verse 25, but it led to their report to the Baptist in the following verse that Jesus was baptizing and all were coming to Him. While these disciples remembered that John had testified about Jesus, they were probably displeased with Jesus' popularity. However, to John, it was only right for people to flock

to Jesus because such was the will of God: “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” (v. 27). He reminded them that he was not Christ but only His forerunner. Comparing himself to the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices with the bridegroom, John stated that his joy was fulfilled by learning that all were going to Jesus. He clearly recognized and gladly submitted to God’s arrangement for Jesus to take center stage and for him to recede from view. This final testimony from John regarding Jesus serves as a strong confirmation to his earlier testimony that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.



## John 19:31–37

- 31 *Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*
- 32 *Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.*
- 33 *But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.*
- 34 *But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.*
- 35 *And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.*
- 36 *For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not one of His bones shall be broken.”*
- 37 *And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The flow of blood and water from Jesus’ side is significant in that:
  - i. It shows that Jesus is the Lamb of God that was slain
  - ii. It shows that Jesus is the Savior through whom the source of life and cleansing is opened

### 2. SETTING

Without parallel in the other Gospels, this passage depicts the final act of cruelty perpetrated against Jesus. On the cross, having accomplished all He had been entrusted to do, Jesus finally gave up His spirit. One of the soldiers, who went to break the legs of

the crucified, pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing an immediate flow of blood and water. The writer captures and stresses this key moment because of its significance to the Gospel and its direct relevance to the reader.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Jesus is the Passover Lamb

The writer notes at the beginning of the passage that it was the Preparation Day, the day before Passover and the day on which the lambs were slaughtered. It was also the day before the Sabbath, the greatest day of the Passover week which in this case also happened to be the weekly Sabbath. On this very special day, when the lambs were to be slaughtered, Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us (cf. 1Cor 5:7).

Since he who is hanged on a tree is accursed of God and must not remain overnight (Deut 21:22, 23), the Jews requested that Pilate break the legs of those on the cross and take their bodies down. After breaking the legs of the two other men on the cross, the soldiers came to Jesus. When they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

The fact that Jesus' legs were not broken fulfilled the Scripture "For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken'" (v. 36).

Concerning the Passover lamb, the LORD commanded the Israelites: "In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones" (Ex 12:46; cf. Num 9:12). The writer might also have had Psalm 34:20 in mind, which states that the LORD guards the bones of the righteous and not one of them is broken.

Here, Jesus is clearly portrayed as the perfect and unblemished Passover Lamb. The words of John the Baptist have now come true: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29).

## b. Blood and water

It is important to note that the event recorded in verses 34 and 35 is special and carries great significance of its own. Verse 34 begins with “but” (ἀλλά). This indicates that what was about to happen was unexpected. Verse 33 records that the soldiers did not proceed to break His legs because they saw that Jesus was already dead. Thus, the death of Jesus was clearly seen and acknowledged by the soldiers. The following description was not to demonstrate that Jesus was already dead. Rather, it conveys to us the result of the piercing as well as to show the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Scripture: “They shall look on Him whom they pierced” (v. 37).

Even though the soldiers saw that Jesus was dead, one of them still pierced His side with a spear. As a result, water and blood came out immediately from Jesus’ side (v. 34). The disciple whom Jesus loved wrote “and he who has seen has testified” (v. 35) because the event was significant to him. Although “they” (the soldiers) saw that Jesus was already dead (v. 33), “he” (this disciple) saw the flow of blood and water from Jesus’ side. This is to say that this is no ordinary event, and it was revealed only to the beloved disciple.

If the focus of the passage was on portraying Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, then the greatest significance of the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus was that from His body came the source of cleansing for all sins. The blood of the Passover Lamb was poured out for the atonement of sin and the deliverance of God’s people. The significance of blood for cleansing is attested to throughout the Scriptures. What is even more striking is that not only blood came out from Jesus, there was also water!

Based on Jesus’ promise of living water in John chapter 7, some commentators have interpreted the water from the side of Jesus as symbolic of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, the Spirit issues from Jesus Christ through His death and brings life to all believers. The Scripture teaches that our eternal life is the result of Christ’s death on the cross. But the pouring out of the Spirit as living water is more closely linked to the resurrection

and ascension of Christ than to His death (cf. Jn 7:39; Acts 2:32, 33). Granted, the Spirit gives life to believers, but spiritual life is given only after the washing away of sins.

Since the water and the blood that flowed from the Passover Lamb have to do with the removal of sins, “water” in this context refers directly to baptism, the effect of which is the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16; 2:38). Baptism is not immersion in water alone; the blood of Christ gives it its cleansing power. According to Ephesians, Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, “that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word” (Eph 5:25, 26). The washing of water, in view of the effect of washing away sins through baptism according to Acts 22:16, is a direct allusion to baptism.

The word πλευρά (“side”) is also used in the Greek translation (LXX<sup>81</sup>) of Genesis 2:22 for the side of Adam, from which God made Eve. Just as Eve was created out of Adam’s side, so the church is created out of the side of Christ. This creation is accomplished through the washing of regeneration (Tit 3:5), the source of which is the blood and water from Jesus’ side. Through the washing of water by the word, namely, through baptism, our sins are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

The writer cites Zechariah’s prophecy concerning Him who was pierced:

*And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech 12:10)*

In fulfillment of this prophecy, Jesus was in fact pierced. The time would come that the Christ would pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication on His people, and they would look on the One who was pierced and “lifted up from the earth” (i.e., He was crucified and exalted) as the Savior of mankind (Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34). In repentance, they would turn to their

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81 The Septuagint

Deliverer. Then a fountain would be opened for them to purify them of their sin and uncleanness (*Zech 13:1*). Truly, Christ the slain Passover Lamb is also the Savior who cleanses His people of all their sins. Because His side was pierced and He was lifted up, we can put our trust in Him and receive cleansing through His blood.

c. A true testimony

The writer explicitly mentions that he testifies to the eyewitness account of the piercing of Christ's side. Moreover, he fervently stresses the truthfulness of his testimony: "and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth" (v. 35). This emphasis underscores the significance of this event. The reiteration that the account is true was probably also due to the miraculous nature of the phenomenon: water distinctly flowing out along with blood from Jesus' side. Comparing this passage with *1 John 5:5-13*, where the theme is also the testimony of Spirit, water, and blood, the presence of water along with blood—an extraordinary sight—was particularly meaningful for the writer. Through the testimony of the Spirit, the blood of Christ did not just flow in history but continues to wash away sins in the water of baptism.

The purpose of the writer's testimony in both *John* chapter 19 and *1 John* chapter 5 is that we may believe that the Son of God takes away the sin of the world. Through believing in our Redeemer, we have eternal life.

# Acts 2:37–41

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism is for the remission of sins (v. 38)
- b. Baptism is administered in the name of Jesus Christ (v. 38)
- c. Faith in Jesus Christ entails receiving baptism
- d. Baptism and repentance are closely connected (vv. 38, 40)
- e. Receiving baptism leads to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (vv. 38, 39)
- f. Baptism is the means through which believers are added to the church (v. 41)

## 2. SETTING

The powerful descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost provided the occasion for the apostles to proclaim Jesus Christ to a great multitude of devout Jews in Jerusalem. Just as the Lord

Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit was poured out and clothed the disciples with power from above. Thus the apostles embarked on the mission to witness for the Lord. During the apostles' first sermon, the listeners were cut to the heart and responded to Peter's call to repentance and baptism. About three thousand were added to the church that day.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. For the remission of sins

In response to the question "what shall we do?" Peter replied, "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" (vv. 37, 38). Few other passages in the Bible state as clearly and directly that the purpose and effect of baptism is the remission of sins.

The meaning of the preposition εἰς ("for") is a subject of great controversy between exegetes with opposing views on the effect of baptism. However, a closer examination clears up the contention.

Used in a logical connection, εἰς with the substantive or accusative noun, as is the case here with ἄφεσιν ("remission"), denotes the direction of an action to a specific end.<sup>82</sup> Hence, the phrase is understood as "for the purpose of the remission of sins." It is clear how the preposition is used in such passages as Matthew 26:28: "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for (εἰς) the remission of sins." It should be beyond doubt that the blood of the Lord Jesus was shed for the purpose of the remission of sins.

A common argument cites the use of εἰς in the sense of "because of" or "in view of." It is true that this preposition is occasionally thus used, e.g. "He did not waver at (εἰς, because of) the promise of God" (Rom 4:20). According to the argument of those who reject baptism as a condition for the remission of sins, a person is baptized because his sins have been forgiven or in view of the fact that the remission of sins has already taken place. Baptism has no effect in the remission of sins

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<sup>82</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 2:429.

but is only a declaration of a reality that has already occurred. Repentance is what results in the remission of sins.

However, the Greek text does not warrant such an interpretation. ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν (“remission of your sins”) is a phrase governed by the noun “remission.” As a noun, the word gives no indication of time. Even if the preposition were translated as “because of” the verse gives no indication that the remission of sins takes place prior to baptism. Thus, to say that Peter directed the people to be baptized because their sin had been forgiven would be adding to the meaning of the text. If we choose to infer that εἰς states the reason to be baptized, it is more accurate to understand Peter’s words as “repent and be baptized in view of the fact that you need the remission of sins.”

Besides semantic considerations, the context also makes baptism a requirement for the remission of sins. Being convicted of their sins and their need for forgiveness, the multitude asked the apostles, “What shall we do?” A response that states, “Repent and be baptized because your sins have been forgiven” would not have answered the question of what to do to receive forgiveness.

If we removed the words “and be baptized” so that the verse reads “Repent for the remission of sins,” few would contest the interpretation that repentance is a condition for the remission of sins. A person who does not repent would not receive the remission of sins. Applying the same rule here, “be baptized for the remission of sins” means that baptism is a condition for the remission of sins. If, in Peter’s mind, baptism were merely a declaration of the remission of sins achieved through repentance alone, he could have said, “Repent for the remission of sins and be baptized.” Therefore, the most natural reading of “repent and be baptized for the remission of sins” is that repentance and baptism are both required for the remission of sins.

#### b. Baptism and repentance

Repentance and baptism go hand in hand because both are required for the remission of sins. Repentance involves the turning of a person, both in heart and conduct, away from



sin and toward God. Prior to the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, repentance was the condition for forgiveness. But because Christ has sacrificed Himself as atonement and shed His blood for redemption, repentance must now be coupled with baptism, for it is through the washing of water by the word that the blood of Christ cleanses all sins (cf. Acts 22:16; Eph 5:25–27). On the other hand, baptism needs to be accompanied by a resolve to turn away from sin. Hence, Peter exhorted the converts to “be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40).

c. Baptism and faith

Peter began his address to the multitude by explaining that the miraculous phenomenon that had just occurred was the promised outpouring of God’s Spirit. Jesus, who was delivered by God and put to death by lawless hands, was raised to life by God. Being exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus received the promise of the Holy Spirit and poured out the Spirit upon the disciples. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit demonstrated that God had made Jesus Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Realizing that Jesus was the Christ and that they had crucified Him, the crowd was cut to the heart. The question “what should we do?” stemmed from the acknowledgement of Jesus as Christ. Baptism is based on the authority of the risen Lord and is a response based on faith in the Lord. Thus, a believer who is baptized is “baptized into Christ,” since Christ is at the center of baptism. Baptism devoid of faith in the Lord Jesus loses its meaning.

d. In the name of Jesus Christ

Because the meaning and effect of baptism are rooted in the risen Christ, baptism is administered in His name. Christ Himself instituted baptism and commanded the disciples to preach and to baptize. The church is sent in the name of Christ to carry out this sacrament. Therefore, it is by His universal authority that the church baptizes for the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, in baptism the believer enters into a union with

Christ and becomes Christ's. He thereby comes under His name when he calls on the name of the Lord (cf. Acts 22:16).

e. Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit

Receiving the promised Holy Spirit follows the call to repentance and receiving baptism: "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). This promise is for everyone, both old and young, near and far, those whom the Lord God will call. According to Peter, these are the ones who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The future indicative verb *λήμψεσθε* ("you shall receive") does not indicate that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is concurrent with baptism. In fact, they are two distinct events (cf. Acts 8:16; 10:44–48; 19:5, 6). Nevertheless, they are intimately connected, for one cannot be without the other. Those who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ shall receive the Holy Spirit just as God promised.

f. Baptism and church membership

The narrative of the epic events that occurred on Pentecost concludes with the statement that those who gladly received Peter's message were baptized and about three thousand souls were added to the church that day (v. 41). Therefore, through baptism in the name of Christ, the believer enters the church of God. *προστέθησαν* ("they were added"), is in the passive voice, connoting that incorporation into the church is an act of God. The church, the body of Christ, consists of those whom God calls and brings into this body through baptism. For this reason, Paul writes, "in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:13). Through the cleansing power of Christ's blood in baptism, God unites each believer with Christ and with the other members of Christ's body.

## Acts 8:4–17

- 4 *Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.*
- 5 *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.*
- 6 *And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.*
- 7 *For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.*
- 8 *And there was great joy in that city.*
- 9 *But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,*
- 10 *to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."*
- 11 *And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.*
- 12 *But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.*
- 13 *Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*
- 14 *Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,*
- 15 *who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.*
- 16 *For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
- 17 *Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism follows belief in the Lord Jesus
- b. Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit are two distinct events

### 2. SETTING

With the death of Stephen came great persecution of the church in Jerusalem. Consequently, believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. This turn of events did not hamper God's purpose. Instead, it catapulted the next phase of church expansion—evangelization to Judea and Samaria (cf. Acts 1:8). Those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went. Luke records the missionary work of Philip in Samaria, which was accompanied by God's miraculous deeds and resulted in a city-wide conversion.

### 3. COMMENTARY

- a. Baptism and faith

The narrative begins by stating that Philip went down to the city of Samaria and “preached the word of Christ to them” (v. 5). Whereas they once heeded Simon the sorcerer, they now heeded Philip when they saw the miracles Philip performed. They believed Philip as he preached “concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (v. 12). In response, they were baptized, both men and women. As much as the signs and miracles played a vital role in turning the people to Christ, these signs and miracles were not the reason for baptism. Rather, the people were baptized when they believed Philip's preaching about Christ. Therefore, the foundation of baptism is faith in Jesus Christ. This faith is behind the Samaritans' baptism “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 16).

- b. Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit

This story of the evangelism to Samaria does not conclude until two apostles went down from Jerusalem to continue the ministry begun by Philip. Even though the believers had accepted the Lord and were baptized, the Holy Spirit had not

fallen on any of them (v. 16). After learning of this, the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John there to pray for them. This incident is a clear indication that baptism in water is to be distinguished from baptism with the Holy Spirit. Although intimately related, they are nevertheless distinct experiences. A person can be baptized when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, but receiving the Holy Spirit depends on God's timing. Thus, it is incorrect to equate baptism with receiving the Holy Spirit.

## Acts 8:26–40

- 26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.
- 27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,
- 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.
- 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."
- 30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"
- 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.
- 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth.
- 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."
- 34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"
- 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.
- 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"
- 37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."
- 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.
- 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.
- 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism is the response to believing in Jesus
- b. Baptism presupposes faith
- c. A Gentile was received as a member of God's people through baptism
- d. Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, suggesting immersion

## 2. SETTING

Just after Philip preached Jesus Christ and brought many to the Lord in Samaria, an angel of the Lord instructed Philip to go to the desert road leading to Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia. This passage records Philip's divine commission and the conversion of this devout eunuch.

## 3. COMMENTARY

### a. Baptism and faith in Jesus Christ

The eunuch's inquiry about the identity of the suffering servant in the Isaiah passage gave Philip a perfect place to begin preaching about Jesus Christ. As they came to some water along the road, the eunuch requested to be baptized. The eunuch's response to Philip's preaching indicates that Philip must have shared baptism with him while he spoke about Jesus Christ. Furthermore, in Philip's message, baptism must have been described as essential to faith in Jesus Christ. If baptism was less than crucial to the acceptance of Jesus Christ, it would be difficult to explain the eunuch's immediate desire for baptism and the narrative's focus on this event.

Although verse 37 is missing in some early manuscripts, it reinforces the teaching that baptism must be based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hearing of Jesus produced faith in the eunuch, and the faith that Jesus was the Son of God moved him to request baptism.

Thus, the response to the preaching of the gospel should be baptism. Baptism, in turn, is to be received with faith in the Lord Jesus.

b. Incorporation of a Gentile into the community of believers

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is significant because it is the first account of the conversion of a non-Jew in the Book of Acts. Although he worshipped God, he was outside the commonwealth of Israel because of his ethnicity. But through faith in Jesus Christ, what was promised to the descendents of Abraham now became available to him. His baptism into Christ placed him among the people of God. As Paul states in Galatians, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27, 28). The baptism of the eunuch indicated that the door of the kingdom of God was now open to peoples of all races.

c. The form of baptism

As the eunuch’s chariot came to some water by the road, the eunuch expressed his desire to be baptized. Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. After they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The phrases *κατέβησαν εἰς* (“they went down into”) and *ἀνέβησαν ἐκ* (“they went up out of”) refer to the act of stepping into and out of water. Even though the account does not describe the manner in which the baptism was administered, the fact that both Philip and the eunuch got off the chariot and went into the water strongly favors immersion as the form of the baptism. Only immersion would require going into the water to administer baptism, whereas sprinkling or ablution could have been performed on dry ground.



# Acts 10:44–48

44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.*

45 *And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.*

46 *For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,*

47 *“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”*

48 *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. God chose Cornelius and his household through divine revelations and the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Spirit
- b. Peter commanded the converts to be baptized, showing that:
  - i. Baptism with water in the name of Jesus Christ is necessary for the remission of sins and for salvation
  - ii. Receiving the Holy Spirit does not replace the need for water baptism

## 2. SETTING

The conversion of Cornelius was pivotal to the expansion of the early church. It was a major breakthrough because God directed Peter, a leading apostle, to carry the gospel of salvation

beyond Jewish boundaries to the Gentiles. This was something unthinkable for the Jews at that time.

Through a vision, God instructed Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. After hearing about Cornelius' vision of an angel, Peter realized that God had sent him there to preach the gospel to Cornelius and his household. While Peter was speaking of Jesus Christ and the remission of sins through His name to Cornelius and those gathered at his house, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening. This clear sign from God dispelled any hesitation on Peter's part to baptize these Gentiles into Christ.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Salvation comes to the Gentiles

The Holy Spirit fell on all who were listening just as it did on the apostles at Pentecost (cf. Acts 11:15), moving them to speak with tongues and magnify God. The circumcised believers who were with Peter were astonished at such a clear bestowal of God's grace. This served as the final word from God that He accepted these Gentile believers. If God had chosen them, Peter reasoned, who could resist God and hinder them from being baptized with water?<sup>83</sup> Thus, Peter commanded them to be baptized.

#### b. The baptism of the converts

The story of Peter's mission to Cornelius' house did not end with the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles. Rather, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit led Peter to instruct them to be baptized with water. It was only after they had been baptized that his divine mission was complete. This indicates the crucial and necessary role of water baptism in conversion.

Firstly, they were baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ."<sup>84</sup> Through baptism, these believers were incorporated into Christ and His body. It is worth noting that Peter's message

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83 κωλύσαι (v. 47) means "to hinder" (cf. Acts 8:36).

84 ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βαπτισθῆναι

concluded with the promise that whoever believed in Jesus Christ would receive the remission of sins through His name (v. 43). This remission of sins through the name of Jesus is effected when the believer is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. It is also through baptism that the believer is united with Christ (Rom 6:3–6) and brought into the fellowship of Christ's body (1Cor 12:13). That is why it was necessary for Cornelius and his relatives and friends to not only hear about Jesus Christ but to also be baptized in the name of Jesus.

Secondly, we observe from Cornelius' story that baptism with the Holy Spirit does not replace baptism with water. This contradicts the argument based on passages such as Matthew 3:11 that the baptism of the Spirit supplanted water baptism. Peter, who happened to also make reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in relation to John's baptism with water (Acts 11:16), deemed it necessary for these Gentiles to be baptized with water in the name of Jesus Christ even though they had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They still needed to be baptized because the remission of sins comes through baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38).

Although Cornelius was a devout and God-fearing man and his prayers were heard by God, his piety was not enough to save him. Therefore, God sent Peter to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to him, by which Cornelius and his house would be saved (Acts 11:14) in order that they might believe in Jesus Christ and receive the remission of sins through His name. Seeing that God poured out His Holy Spirit even on the Gentiles, Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus, baptism with water in the name of Jesus Christ completed the conversion experience and accomplished the purpose for which Peter had been sent—that Cornelius and his house may be saved.

The baptism of Cornelius was the connection point through which the wild olive branch was grafted onto the tree (cf. Rom 11:17–24). Just as God added the Jewish converts to the church through baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38, 41), He now also brought the Gentiles into the church through baptism.

# Acts 16:13–15; 29–34

- 13 *And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.*
- 14 *Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*
- 15 *And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.*
- 29 *Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.*
- 30 *And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*
- 31 *So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*
- 32 *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*
- 33 *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.*
- 34 *Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Entire households were baptized
- b. Belief in the Lord Jesus involves receiving baptism

## 2. SETTING

The vision of the Macedonian call brought Paul and his coworkers to Macedonia. Philippi was the first city they visited there. Luke depicts two instances of conversion, namely that of Lydia's household and the jailer's entire family. Lydia believed in the Lord when

Paul spoke to the women who gathered to pray by the riverside. Later, Paul and Silas were imprisoned because of the malice of a slave girl's masters. While the apostles were praying and singing hymns in prison, God caused a great earthquake, which led to the jailer's conversion. The topic of our interest is the role of baptism in the conversion of these two households.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Household baptism

For the first time in the New Testament, household baptism is explicitly mentioned. Both Lydia and the jailer led their families to the Lord, and both families were baptized. The accounts provide no information on whether or not these two particular households had any infants or young children. But it would be going beyond what the text says to maintain that there were no infants or young children in these two families because only adults can be baptized. The very term "household" implies that it encompasses every member of the household, including infants and young children if there were any (see discussion on household baptism).

#### b. Baptism, conversion, and salvation

We notice in both stories that belief in the Lord Jesus was followed by baptism. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to heed the things spoken by Paul (v. 14). In the very next verse, although it does not explicitly state that Lydia put her faith in the Lord, it states that she and her household were baptized. Luke's terse description contains an assumption that the reader will draw the connection between baptism and belief.

The sense of immediacy in the baptism of the jailer's household is even more striking. Realizing that Paul and Silas were sent from God, the jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" (v. 30) They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). They subsequently preached the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. He and his household were baptized that very night. Baptism was deemed so essential that

it could not wait until the next day. It is apparent, then, that the hearing and the acceptance of the apostles' preaching and the receiving of baptism were all part of jailer's belief in God and His salvation. Baptism is the concrete outcome of faith in Christ. As an integral part of one's belief in the Lord Jesus, baptism is necessary for salvation.

## Acts 18:24–28; 19:1–7

24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.

26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;

28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples

2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

7 Now the men were about twelve in all.

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. John's baptism pointed to Jesus Christ and was not an end in itself
- b. Baptism is to be received with faith in Jesus Christ and in the name of Jesus Christ
- c. Baptism is a necessary part of conversion
  - i. Disciples were assumed to be baptized
  - ii. The issues surrounding baptism in this passage indicate the importance and necessity of baptism
  - iii. Baptism is not merely ceremonial but has a real effect
- d. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is necessary for receiving the Holy Spirit

## 2. SETTING

Paul began his third missionary journey by passing through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia and strengthening the disciples there. At this time, a Jew by the name of Apollos came to Ephesus to teach the things of the Lord, but he knew only the baptism of John. After learning from Aquila and Priscilla more about the way of the Lord, Apollos went to Achaia and helped the brethren there greatly. When Paul came to Ephesus, he found some disciples there. This passage records this encounter and its outcome for the disciples there.

## 3. COMMENTARY

### a. John's baptism

Both narratives mention John's baptism and present it as insufficient in light of the remission of sins attained through the name of Jesus Christ.

Although Apollos was a fervent preacher who taught the things of the Lord accurately, he only knew of the baptism of John. This inadequacy prompted Aquila and Priscilla to explain to him the way of God more accurately. After Aquila and Priscilla instructed him, he was able to vigorously refute the Jews,



showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. It appears from these facts that even though Apollos had a good knowledge of Jesus, he was not aware that the new era of redemption had come in which the promised Holy Spirit had been poured out and baptism for the remission of sins was now to be administered by the authority of the risen Lord and in the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 28:18–20; Acts 2:32–39).

The disciples Paul met in Ephesus had neither received nor even heard of the Holy Spirit. They had already accepted Jesus, for the term “disciple” suggests that they were followers of Jesus. But they were ignorant of the Holy Spirit and seemed to have little knowledge about Jesus as the risen Savior. It turned out that they had only been baptized into John’s baptism and needed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. John’s baptism was not an end in itself. The purpose of John’s baptism was to lead people to repentance and faith in Jesus. After God had raised Jesus up as Lord and Christ, believers needed to accept Jesus as Lord and be baptized into His name to receive the promised Holy Spirit. That is why the disciples in Ephesus were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and, with the laying on of hands, received the Holy Spirit.

b. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ

John’s baptism of repentance was ordained by God in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. It was valid and effective insofar as it turned hearts toward God and made them ready to receive Christ. However, after Christ rose from the dead and received all authority, He commanded that baptism be administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). Based on the teachings of Christ Himself and the examples of the apostles, we understand that this name is none other than the name of Jesus Christ (see commentary on Mt 28:16–20). On the day of Pentecost, Peter specifically called for baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Baptism for the purpose of repentance alone was no longer sufficient. For the believer to enter into a saving relationship with Christ, baptism had to be accompanied by faith in the risen Christ and received in His name.

Paul asked the disciples in Ephesus, “Into what then were you baptized?” (v. 3) A believer not only needs to be baptized, he needs to be baptized into Christ. Baptism should not be received for any other purpose or in anyone else’s name. After understanding that Jesus was the goal of John’s baptism, the disciples in Ephesus were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.<sup>85</sup> Through baptism in Jesus’ name, they were brought into Christ’s body and now belonged to Christ.

c. The importance of baptism

It is evident from the study of these two narratives that baptism plays a crucial role in conversion. Paul’s first concern when learning that the disciples in Ephesus had not received the Holy Spirit was the kind of baptism they had received. First, this implies that Paul took it for granted that all disciples must have been baptized. He did not ask whether they had ever been baptized because he assumed that, as disciples, they had already been baptized. Instead, he asked them what baptism they had received. Second, the disciples had to be baptized again, and this time in the name of Jesus Christ. This is further evidence of the necessity of baptism, for if acceptance of Jesus was sufficient without baptism, then Paul would not have needed to inquire about baptism in the first place or direct them to be baptized again. He could have simply taught them more about Jesus Christ and instructed them to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior. However, these disciples not only accepted Jesus Christ but also received baptism in His name.

It is also important to note that baptism is to be received in the right way. Apollos knew of baptism, but that was inadequate because he only knew the baptism of John. The disciples in Ephesus had been baptized, but they had only been baptized into John’s baptism. Since the Holy Spirit had come and remission of sins had been made available through faith in Christ, a believer had to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus,

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85 εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (Acts 19:5)

the correct understanding, administration, and receiving of baptism do make a difference in its outcome.

d. Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit

The example of the Ephesian disciples teaches us the relationship that baptism has on receiving the Holy Spirit. These disciples had not received the Holy Spirit because they had not been baptized into His name. However, after they were baptized into Christ, the Holy Spirit came upon them. Just as Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a promise to those who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Because the remission of sins and entrance into Christ's body take place through baptism, there is a close connection between baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit.

## Acts 9:17–19; 22:12–16

17 *And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

18 *Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.*

19 *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.*

12 *“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there,*

13 *came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him.*

14 *Then he said, “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.*

15 *For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.*

16 *And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The two imperatives, “be baptized” and “wash away your sins,” connect baptism with the washing away of sins
- b. Baptism is inseparable from faith in the Lord

### 2. SETTING

While he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians in that city, Saul encountered the risen Christ and was awakened to the fact that he had been persecuting the Lord. Blinded, trembling and astonished, Saul asked the Lord what to do. The Lord

instructed him to go into the city, and that he would be told what to do. Ananias, having been sent by the Lord in a vision, came to Saul. He restored Saul's sight and revealed to him the Lord's commission for him. Then he commanded Saul to be immediately baptized and wash away his sins.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. "Wash away your sins" (v. 16)

Many interpreters infer that because Ananias addressed Saul as "brother" that Saul was already a Christian and forgiven of his sins even before his baptism. But the term "brother," was not used exclusively to address Christians. The Jews customarily called other fellow Jews brothers (cf. Lk 6:42; Acts 2:37; 7:23; 13:15; 22:5; 28:21; Heb 7:5). This was also the way the apostles addressed other fellow Jews who were not yet Christians (Acts 2:29; 3:17; 7:2; 13:26, 38; 22:1; 23:1, 5, 6; 28:17).

The key question here is whether or not baptism results in the washing away of sins. Among the four verbs in Ananias' command, two are imperatives ("be baptized" and "wash away") and two are aorist participles ("having stood up" and "having called on"). Based on Ananias' words, what resulted in the washing away of Saul's sins? We shall evaluate each of the options below:

#### i. Saul washed away his sins when he arose

"Arise" is an aorist participle in the sentence, an action that precedes the leading verbs. Thus, Ananias' words were literally, "Having stood up, baptize yourself and wash your sins away, having called on His name." If Saul's sins were washed away when he got up, before he was baptized, the command would have been, "Having stood up and having washed away your sins, baptize yourself, having called on His name." Both the tense and word order indicate that the washing away of sins did not occur when Saul arose.

#### ii. Saul washed away his sins when he called on the name of the Lord

“Calling on His name” is also an aorist participle in the sentence. Again, it is an action that precedes the main verbs “baptize” and “wash away.” In other words, after Saul arises and calls on the name of the Lord, he is to baptize himself and wash away his sins. While the two actions are related, “having called on the name of the Lord” does not directly affect the washing away of sins. If it did, Ananias would have said, “Baptize yourself, having called on the name of the Lord and washed your sins away.”

- iii. Saul washed away his sins without connection with any other action

“Wash away” is a middle imperative verb. In other words, Ananias commanded Saul to wash away his sins. An action was required on Saul’s part. If the command is not coupled with any other action, then we must ask, “How exactly was Saul to wash away his sins?”

- iv. Saul washed away his sins when he was baptized

The only sound explanation is to connect the two imperatives “get baptized” and “wash away.” Ananias commanded Saul to wash away his sins, and to carry out that command, Saul would have to carry out the command to be baptized. In other words, the washing away of sins takes place during baptism. This is consistent with other passages in the Bible about the effect of baptism. In particular, Ananias’ command to Saul parallels the call of Peter on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

When Ananias told Saul to be baptized and wash away his sins, Saul could hardly have understood the statement to mean anything other than that he needed to be baptized for the remission of his sins. Verse 16 closely connects baptism and the washing away of sins in such a manner that it simply cannot be explained away without forcing a convoluted interpretation.

The need for Saul to be baptized indicates the great importance of baptism within conversion. Many great supernatural events led Saul to his conversion: a light shone around him from heaven (Acts 9:3); Jesus spoke to Him through a voice (Acts 9:4–6); he was blinded and later received his sight (Acts 9:8, 17–18); and he even received the commission to be the Lord’s witness (Acts 26:16–18). Yet despite all these experiences from God, Saul still stood as a sinner before God. That is why Ananias urged Saul to get up and be baptized in order to wash away his sins. No other conversion experience can replace baptism as the means to wash away sins.

b. “Calling on His name” (v. 16)

The command to be baptized presupposes that the candidate calls on the name of the Lord. Thus, the reception of baptism is not to be separated from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The acknowledgement of the Lord’s name is also central to baptism, for we are baptized into the name of the Lord.

# Romans 6:1–11

- 1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*
- 2 *Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*
- 3 *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*
- 4 *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*
- 5 *For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,*
- 6 *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*
- 7 *For he who has died has been freed from sin.*
- 8 *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,*
- 9 *knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.*
- 10 *For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*
- 11 *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism is central to a believer's conversion
- b. Through baptism, our old man dies to sin.
- c. In baptism, we are united together with Christ
- d. Baptism is received in the likeness of Christ's death
  - i. We are dead to sin in the same manner that Christ died to sin



- ii. The candidate should bow his head just as Jesus did before He gave up His spirit on the cross.
- e. Immersion is the implied form of baptism
- f. Since we have been baptized into Christ's death, we must not continue to live in sin
- g. Unity with Christ in baptism will result in unity with Christ in His resurrection

## 2. SETTING

Paul demonstrated in earlier chapters in Romans that justification is received through faith in God's grace in Jesus Christ. Christ, the new Adam, brought hope to humanity. While death entered into the world through one man's transgression, the effect of Christ's atoning death brought justification to all men. Hence, this gift of grace is greater than sin, freeing men from condemnation. "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Rom 5:20).

At this point, Paul asks a question. "What shall we say then?" (Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν). This expression is Paul's way of addressing a possible misinterpretation of his words (cf. 7:7). "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Critics of the doctrine of grace may challenge that justification offered freely to sinners would encourage indulgence in sin. But Paul points out the absurdity of such thinking. A person who has died to sin cannot live in sin any longer (6:2). It is in this context that Paul mentions Christian baptism.

## 3. COMMENT

- a. Crucial place of baptism

In response to the question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Paul calls to mind the believers' baptism. This reference to baptism underscores the fact that believers in the early church had all received baptism. For Paul, it was a given that his Christian readers had been baptized. If baptism was not administered to all believers, Paul's entire line of

argument based on “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus” would not have been able to stand.

Although the main focus of this passage is not about baptism, it illustrates the fact that baptism holds such a crucial place in the Christian conversion experience. Without it, the passage would be devoid of its basis. Paul is able to write so definitively that believers are dead to sin precisely because they have been baptized into Christ’s death.

b. Died to sin

Paul argues that those who have died to sin must not live in sin any longer. Who are those who have died to sin? Verse 3 gives us the answer. “As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death.” We died to sin when we were baptized into Christ Jesus. Verse 4 continues this thought, “We were buried with Him through baptism into death.” Verse 6 also states that our old man was crucified with Him. Thus, baptism is the moment when the old man dies to sin and is buried into Christ’s death. Paul concludes in verse 11, “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Anyone who has been baptized into Christ has been cut off from sin and must live a new life to God.

c. Our old man was crucified

The death that Paul speaks of is the death of the old man: “Our old man was crucified with Him.” This death is the spiritual death as a result of sin. When Adam disobeyed God’s command, he died a spiritual death, for God had warned him, “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). Through the sin of one man, death spread to all men (Rom 5:12). The human race is in a state of spiritual death because of sin’s reign. Thus, we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). The old man, characterized by sinful conduct (Eph 4:22), was under the dominion of death.

What does it mean, then, that the old man was crucified? The crucifixion here means putting an end to the rule of sin and setting the believer free from sin’s power so that he is able

to live a new life to God. Furthermore, the death of the old man liberates him from sin's condemnation, just as a convict who has died is no longer under the law's incrimination. Referencing back to the contrast between Adam and Christ in chapter 5, the crucifixion and death of the old man denote the end of the reign of sin under the first Adam and the beginning of the triumph of grace in Christ. Through baptism, God "delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13, 14).

Scripture is therefore able to speak of baptism as burial into Christ's death. Such language points definitively to the effect of baptism. The sinner dies to sin in baptism. Sin cannot claim ownership over him anymore, just as death no longer has dominion of over the risen Christ (v. 9). The saving power of God comes upon him when he is baptized into Christ, forgiving him of his sins and delivering him out of sin.

The goal of the crucifixion of the old man is that "the body of sin might be done away with" (v. 6). The body of sin is the man that was dead in sin and subject to the desires of the flesh. It is done away with, or put off, through baptism (cf. Col 2:11–13). Consequently, we are free from sin's slavery. We are "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11), and we are able to live a new life (v. 4).

#### d. Unity with Christ

Paul uses many συν- (meaning "together") compound verbs in this passage: "Buried [together]" συνετάφημεν (v. 4); "united together" σύμφυτοι (v. 5); "crucified together" συνεσταυρώθη (v. 6); "live together" συζήσομεν (v. 8). The pervasive thought here is that the believer is joined with Christ through baptism. In baptism, we are united together in the likeness of His death, and crucified with Him, and buried with him into death. The death we die in baptism is not our death, but Christ's death (v. 3).

Twice in the passage, the word οὕτως ("even so") draws a parallel between Christ and the baptized. "Therefore we were

buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (v. 4). “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 10, 11). Christ’s death and resurrection are the foundation and model for the death of the old man and rising up of the new life we experience in baptism.

To be freed from sin, be alive to God, and live together with God in the future, the believer needs to first be joined with Christ in His death through baptism. The atoning death of Jesus Christ in history takes its effect on us when we are baptized in His name. Our old man dies with Him in baptism and we are given a new life. Thus, baptism into Christ is a necessary and crucial part of the salvation experience.

Since Paul points to the believers’ baptism in the midst of his discourse on sin and grace, we can further view the significance of baptism by relating it to the larger context of this passage. In chapter 5, Paul writes of the justification by Christ’s blood, which sets us free from sin and death and enables us to reign in life. In view of the effects of baptism spoken of in chapter 6, it becomes clear that this grace of justification and life comes to the believer when he is baptized into Christ’s death. The blood of Jesus Christ is applied to the believer during baptism, delivering him from death into life.

e. The form of baptism

Although Paul’s intention here is not to give instructions about baptism, we can infer from the passage the form of baptism in the apostolic days.

i. In the likeness of His death

“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (v. 5). What is the “likeness” (ὁμοίωμα) here? In its New Testament usage, “likeness” means the copy of

an object, which often denotes a physical representation.<sup>86</sup> In a general sense, the death we die to sin is a copy of the death of Christ, and our resurrection will be a copy of Christ's resurrection. In other words, if we die to sin in the same manner as Christ died to sin, we shall resurrect with triumph over death in the same manner as Christ's resurrection.

However, we also cannot lose sight of the fact that the death of Christ is connected to baptism in Romans chapter 6. Since baptism consists of an outward form, and ὁμοίωμα is repeatedly used to mean a physical likeness, we must not exclude the notion that Paul was also thinking of the unity of the form of baptism with the form of Christ's death. What is the form of Christ's death? The only explicit description of this is found in John 19:30: "And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." "Having bowed," κλίνας is an aorist participle, indicating that it is an action prior to the action of the leading verb, "He gave over," παρέδωκεν. So we may translate the verse as, "After He had bowed His head, He gave up His spirit." The form of Jesus' death was not the natural result of death, but the deliberate final act of Jesus on the cross before he gave up His spirit. Thus, since the outward form of baptism portrays the inward spiritual effects, the proper form to be baptized is to bow one's head in the likeness of Jesus' form of death.

## ii. Buried through baptism

"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death" (v. 4). How are we "buried into death" through baptism? To understand this expression figuratively, our old man submerges completely in death the way a body is completely put away in burial. However, Paul could also have in mind the form of baptism, in which the person is immersed in water. In this sense, the outward form of baptism appropriately depicts the inner death of the old man.

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<sup>86</sup> New Testament usage of ὁμοίωμα: "Likeness of image of corruptible man" (Rom 1:23); "the likeness of the transgression of Adam" (Rom 5:14); "likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3); "coming in the likeness of men" (Php 2:7); "the shape of locusts" (Rev 9:7).

f. Ethical implications of baptism

Paul cites the believer's baptism to expose the error of the thought that one may continue in sin that grace may abound. Since in baptism a believer dies to sin together with Christ, sin has no place in his life anymore. Continuing in sin is simply not an option for the baptized. Therefore, baptism marks the beginning of a new life, a life free from sin's dominion. Our baptism should constantly remind us that we are in no way ruled by sin's sway and desires.

Verse 5 states, "For if we have become united together in the likeness of His death." The word *γεγόναμεν* (have become) is in the perfect tense. The Greek perfect tense denotes the present state resultant upon a past action.<sup>87</sup> The implication here is that our insertion into Christ's death was final, resulting in our present state of being united together in the likeness of His death. After we have been baptized, we have died to sin once for all, just as Christ died to sin once for all (v. 10). Thus, a Christian is completely cut off from the slavery of the sinful life under the age of the old Adam, never to return to it again. His is to live to God alone, and his daily walk ought to reflect this new life.

g. Baptism and resurrection

The death that we die with Christ in baptism results in a new life with Christ (vv. 4, 10–11). Thus, baptism is key to the beginning of our spiritual life. Not only so, baptism also plants the seed for our future bodily resurrection. "For if we have been united in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (v. 5). The word *ἔσομεθα* ("we shall be") is in the future tense, suggesting that it is referring to the bodily resurrection at the coming of Christ. This reinforces the usage of *ὁμοίωμα* ("likeness") to denote a physical form, i.e. our resurrected body will take the form of that of Christ.

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87 Machen, J. Gresham. *New Testament Greek for Beginners*. p. 242

# 1 Corinthians 1:10–17

- 10 *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*
- 11 *For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.*
- 12 *Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."*
- 13 *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*
- 14 *I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,*
- 15 *lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.*
- 16 *Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.*
- 17 *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Believers were baptized in the name of Jesus.
- b. Baptism was a universal event for all believers.
- c. Paul by no means devalues baptism.

## 2. SETTING

The believers in Corinth, although rich in utterance and knowledge (1Cor 1:5), were carnal and spiritually immature (1Cor 3:1–4). Because of their pride and envy, there was widespread division among them. They formed factions among themselves by claiming loyalty to gifted and powerful workers like Paul, Apollos,

and Cephas. They took pride in aligning themselves with these servants of God so as to imply superiority over others. Some of them even claimed a special tie to Christ. This problem of division is the first that Paul tackles in his epistle to the Corinthians, and the subject of baptism comes into play in his plea to them for unity.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Baptism in the name of Jesus

The Corinthians divided themselves according to their self-made affiliations. Each of them said, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” To help them see the error of their division, Paul asks them a series of fundamental questions: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (v. 13). The aim of these rhetorical questions is to bring them back to the basic truth that all believers belong to none other than Christ. If Christ has only one body and is not divided, there is no reason for the members of His body to be divided.

Believers belong to Christ alone because He alone has been crucified for them and redeemed them with His precious blood. Closely connected to Christ’s crucifixion is the believers’ baptism. Since baptism is rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom 6:2, 3; Col 2:12–14), it is natural for Paul to bring up baptism alongside Christ’s crucifixion. In fact, it is through baptism that the believer becomes united with their crucified Lord and Savior.

Paul wants the Corinthians to remember in whose name they have been baptized. It goes without saying that none of them were baptized in the name of Paul, or of Apollos or of Cephas. Instead, they have all been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—a fact whose significance Paul wishes the believers could once again realize. As recorded in the New Testament, the church baptized converts “in the name of Jesus Christ” (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). The Corinthian believers could recall that when they were baptized, the name of Jesus Christ



was invoked over them. Through baptism in His name, they became members of Christ's body, and were bound to none other than Christ. Therefore, it is wrong for a believer of Christ to claim loyalty to anyone else. It is also on such a basis that no Christian can claim special affinity to Christ more so than another member of Christ's body, for all who have been baptized belong to Christ.

b. The universality of baptism

In speaking about the unity of believers in Christ, Paul appeals to an event that all believers have undergone—their baptism in the name of Christ. It is assumed that all believers in Christ have been baptized, for if there is any doubt as to whether the Corinthian believers have been baptized, Paul's appeal would not have been effective at all. Furthermore, the fact that Paul speaks of their baptism proves that in Paul's mind, baptism was always administered to believers in the New Testament church, and it was a common experience that all of Paul's readers could recall. If baptism were not a universal experience, the call to unity on the basis of baptism would be problematic. But because every believer has been baptized, their baptism into Christ binds them together as members of the same body. Just as all believers have put their faith in the crucified Savior, they have also all been baptized in His name. This serves as the premise for the rhetorical questions, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (v. 13).

c. The importance of baptism

Not only were the believers in Corinth not baptized in the name of Paul, Paul is thankful that most of them were also not baptized by him. He even writes that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Many of those who reject the effects and necessity of baptism cite Paul's words here as a basis for their views. If baptism were essential to salvation, the argument goes, how could Paul thank God for having only baptized a few? They contend that the preaching of the gospel is what leads to a person's salvation, not baptism. Thus, Paul places his focus on preaching the gospel and regards baptism as relatively unimportant.

To conclude that Paul devalues baptism is to take Paul's words out of context. Why does Paul thank God for having baptized only a few? Is it because Paul deems baptism as insignificant? The thrust of this passage is not whether baptism is important or necessary for salvation. Paul is thankful for having baptized only a few members, saying "lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name" (v. 15). To follow the reminder on whose name they had been baptized in, Paul points out that he has hardly baptized anyone in Corinth. For this reason, no one could say that Paul baptized anyone in his own name or they had been baptized in Paul's name. Paul brings up baptism in this context in order to remove any possible basis on which the believers could claim special affiliation to him. Paul was not crucified for them. They were not baptized in Paul's name. Most of them were not even baptized by Paul. Therefore, no believer belongs to Paul.

If Paul indeed regarded baptism as unimportant to a believer's salvation or place in the body of Christ, what would Paul achieve by asking his readers to recall in whose name they had been baptized? What would be the significance that the believers had been baptized in Christ's name instead of Paul's? Would not even the mention of baptism detract from, rather than strengthen, his argument? As Cottrell correctly observes, "[Paul's] reasoning presupposes the importance of baptism, not its unimportance."<sup>88</sup>

If it were true that Paul disclaims any merit in baptizing the believers because baptism is unimportant, then can we not say the same of the question, "Was Paul crucified for you?" (v. 13)? By reminding his readers that he was not crucified for them, was Paul saying that the crucifixion was unimportant? Quite the contrary! Paul wants the believers to remember who was crucified for them because the crucifixion is central to a believer's faith and salvation. Since baptism in Christ's name is mentioned alongside Christ's crucifixion, it should be clear that Paul mentions baptism here not because it is unimportant, but precisely because it has such a crucial place in a believer's

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88 Cottrell, p 13

conversion. Baptism is so important that if those who took pride in Paul had indeed been baptized by Paul, they would have easily used that as a basis for their boasting. Therefore, Paul is very much relieved that almost none of them had been baptized by him.

One question remains. Why does Paul write that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel, if baptism is such an integral part of salvation? Once again, bear in mind that Paul's concern in the context of this passage is not whether baptism is important or not, but that he had baptized only a few lest anyone should say Paul had baptized in his own name. To continue with the thought of not placing one's pride on any human being, Paul notes that baptizing is not his primary mission from Christ. That is why he focuses on preaching the gospel and lets other workers administer baptisms. Paul again speaks of such a delegation of various ministries in 1 Corinthians 3:5, 6: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Just as the work of planting is no more important than the work of watering, the preaching of the gospel is no more important than baptizing.

Granted, the preaching of the gospel necessarily takes priority over baptism. But this priority is one of order, not of importance. Hearing and believing the gospel must precede the reception of baptism, just as planting must precede watering—yet both are just as important.

Just because Paul did not always personally baptize converts does not mean that baptisms were neglected in the early church. In fact, as recorded in Acts 19:1–7, Paul was so concerned about the baptism of the Ephesian disciples that he immediately baptized them when he found out that they had not been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. He and Silas also immediately baptized Lydia and the jailer, as well as their households, upon their conversion during the missionary visit in Philippi (Acts 16:15, 33). Even if Paul did not typically

perform baptism himself, others must have carried out that important work.

Finally, we should not forget that Paul discusses the significance of baptism more than any other writer in the New Testament. Passages such as Romans 6:1–4 and Colossians 2:11, 12 all present baptism as a death, burial, and resurrection with Christ by the working power of the risen Christ. For Paul to dismiss the importance of baptism in his letter to the Corinthians is to completely contradict his other writings that give baptism such crucial significance.

# 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

- 9 *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,*
- 10 *nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*
- 11 *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Verse 11 refers to baptism
- b. God's Spirit works through baptism
- c. Baptism calls for righteous living

## 2. SETTING

Paul addresses the Corinthians concerning the sexual immorality among them. Rather than mourning the sin, the believers were arrogant. They tolerated the wicked and did not drive them out of their midst. Not only did they fail to exercise judgment in God's house, they even wronged and cheated one another, going as far as bringing lawsuits against each other. In urging them to remove all such sinful conducts, Paul warns them that those who practice wickedness have no place in the kingdom of God. He also reminds them of the grace of having been delivered from sin.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Grace received through baptism

While some of the Corinthians believers used to live in immorality like the godless people of the world, they now have a completely different status in Christ. To emphasize that they should no longer have any part in a life of sin, Paul repeats the word “but” (ἀλλὰ) three times as a way of contrast between the “before” and the “now,” followed by these facts: “you were washed” (ἀπελούσασθε), “you were sanctified” (ἡγιάσθητε), “you were justified” (ἐδικαιώθητε). The washing, sanctifying, and justifying were done “in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11).

“Washing,” when used in the Bible in a spiritual sense, most often denotes the inner cleansing of sins (cf. Prov 30:12; Ps 51:7; Isa 1:16; 4:4; Jer 4:14; Ezek 36:25; Zech 13:1; Acts 22:16; Rev 1:5).

“Sanctification” is a divine act of separating from the profane, including the consecration of priests, people, animals, or objects (cf. Ex 13:2; 29:21, 43; 30:29) as well as the hallowing of God and His name (Lev 10:3; Num 20:12; Isa 29:23; Ezek 20:41; Mt 6:9). In the New Testament, Jesus was sanctified (Jn 10:36; 17:19), and those who belong to Christ are sanctified by the atoning blood of Christ (Jn 17:19; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Eph 5:26; Heb 2:11; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12).

“Justification,” when used of God, refers to vindicating God (cf. Ps 51:4; Lk 7:29). When applied to men, the term often carries a forensic sense of “to pronounce righteous” or “to acquit” (Ex 23:7; Deut 25:1; Prov 17:15; Gen 44:16). A person is justified by God when he is reckoned as righteous (Lk 18:14). In the New Testament, God justifies sinners through faith on account of the blood of Christ (Acts 13:39; Rom 3:24, 26, 30; 5:1, 9; Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24). The justified is delivered from his sins (Acts 13:38, 39; Rom 6:7), and continues to stand justified by putting his faith to work (Jas 2:21–24; 1Jn 3:7).

Paul makes no mention of baptism in this passage. So on what basis can we be certain that the washing, sanctification, and justification verse 11 speaks of take place in baptism?

The three verbs are in the aorist tense, pointing to events that have taken place. Whatever sins they had committed in the past, they were washed clean once for all. They were also sanctified and justified before God. On what occasion(s) did this washing, sanctification, and justification take place? Dunn states that Paul is not talking about baptism at all but rather a larger spiritual event of transformation and conversion, whether it coincides chronologically with baptism or not.<sup>89</sup> Without a doubt, Paul is speaking of spiritual events that took place inwardly in a believer's conversion. But, as can be seen from the following points, the Scriptures do connect these spiritual effects to the sacrament of baptism.

- i. The verb ἀπελούσασθε (“you were washed”) is the same as that used by Ananias when he commanded Saul to be baptized and wash away (ἀπόλουσαι) his sins (Acts 22:16). In both instances, the middle voice is used (wash away for yourself)—an indication that it is an action that involves the individual's voluntary participation.<sup>90</sup> “In the name of the Lord Jesus” also corresponds with “calling on the name of the Lord.” This similarity in language between the two passages suggests that the washing in 1 Corinthians 6:11 is also speaking of the cleansing received through baptism.
- ii. The washing away of sins is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:5). If such washing is the result of baptism, as Ananias' words indicate, that means the blood of Jesus Christ is applied to the sinner during his baptism. This understanding of baptism is also consistent with 1 John 5:6–8. Furthermore, the Scriptures also teach that we are sanctified and justified by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:29; Rom 5:9)—a fact that leads to the conclusion that sanctification

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89 J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the NT Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today*, SBT 2 (London: SCM, 1970), 121; cf. 120–23 on this passage, and 116–31 on this epistle.

90 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 163.

and justification are also imparted to the sinner through baptism. In other words, Christ washes us, sanctifies us, and justifies us by His blood when we are baptized in His name.

- iii. In Romans chapter 6, a key passage on the significance and effects of baptism, Paul writes, “For he who has died has been freed from sin” (v. 7). The word “freed” translates the Greek word *δεδικαίωται*, meaning “justified.” The death of the believer marks the point of justification from sin. When does this death to sin and resulting justification take place? Paul explains, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death...” (Rom 6:3, 4). Thus, a believer is justified from sin when he is baptized into Christ. This confirms that Paul has in mind the believer’s baptism in 1 Corinthians 6:11 when he writes, “But you were justified.”

If Dunn were right in believing that Paul was referring not to baptism but to some “great spiritual transformation of conversion,” when was this event? Paul is certainly not speaking of a duration of gradual transformation and conversion, since he uses the aorist tense. What other occasion could Paul have in mind when he describes the time when the believers were once and for all cut off from their past sinful lives? Do the Scriptures speak of another occasion than baptism that marks the washing, sanctification, and justification of the sinner? To insist that these spiritual effects must be dissociated from baptism when the Bible does not hesitate to connect them together would be unnecessary and unbiblical.

#### b. Basis for the effect of baptism

The three verbs of verse 11 are followed by two prepositional phrases: “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (*ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*) and “by the Spirit of our God” (*ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν*). These two phrases function as the basis for the spiritual effects of baptism.

Baptism is no mere immersion in water, but binds the believer to Christ. Therefore, baptism is administered in the name of



the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cf. 1 Cor 1:13), and the believer calls upon Jesus' name in baptism (Acts 22:16). Jesus, by whose name we are saved (Acts 4:12) and in whose name we put our trust, cleanses us with His blood when we are baptized in His name.

The Spirit of God is also at work in baptism (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). He grants the church the authority to forgive sins (Jn 20:22, 23) and bears witness during baptism (1 Jn 5:6, 8). Thus, the washing of rebirth that takes place in baptism is in fact the regenerating work of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5–8).

c. Ethical implications of baptism

Taken in the context of 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul's aim in reminding his readers of their new spiritual life given at baptism is to urge them to live a holy life. The unethical and immoral conduct of the believers in Corinth have no place in the kingdom of God. Although some of them used to live in immorality, they were washed, sanctified, and justified once for all by the blood of Christ. Recalling the grace of God that granted them a new life should be a sober reminder that they are not to return to the former state. Likewise, our baptism today also calls us to a life that is set apart from the immoralities that prevail in the world. Each reminder of the time when Christ washed, sanctified, and justified us should continue to motivate us to live a life worthy of our calling.

# 1 Corinthians 10:1–13

- 1 *Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,*
- 2 *all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,*
- 3 *all ate the same spiritual food,*
- 4 *and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*
- 5 *But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*
- 6 *Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.*
- 7 *And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”*
- 8 *Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;*
- 9 *nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;*
- 10 *nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*
- 11 *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*
- 12 *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*
- 13 *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The Israelites' baptism into Moses in the cloud and in the sea is likened to our baptism into Christ.
- b. The Israelites' fall after they had received God's deliverance warns all believers to guard against sin.

## 2. SETTING

The transitional word γὰρ (“moreover” or “for”) in verse 1 indicates that this passage provides further exposition on the previous passage. In 9:24–27, Paul writes that he disciplines himself in the race and fight to win the crown lest he becomes disqualified. In the current passage Paul cites the failure of the Israelites in their wilderness journey to show why it is critical to exercise self-discipline on our heavenly journey.

## 3. STRUCTURE

In verses 1-4, the word “all” occurs five times, emphasizing that God's deliverance and grace were given to all the Israelites who entered the wilderness. In verses 6–10, the words “some of them” are repeated five times, pointing to those within the assembly of Israel who succumbed to sin. Although all entered the race, not all made it to the end.

## 4. COMMENTARY

### a. Baptism into Moses

Paul describes God's deliverance and guidance of the Israelites through the Red Sea and with the pillar of cloud as a “baptism.” Just as we are immersed in water when we are baptized, the Israelites were surrounded by the cloud above them and the Red Sea around them. Through baptism, we are redeemed by Christ out of eternal perdition and brought into a new life. In like manner, the Israelites were saved from the threat of death through the deliverer Moses when they went through the sea and were under the cloud. The reference here to the deliverance of the Israelites as a baptism gives us a basis to

understand our baptism into Christ as the means through which God saves us today.

b. The need for believers to guard against sin

The fall of the Israelites who sinned in the wilderness teaches all believers today that our baptism into Christ offers no guarantee that we would never fall. On this basis, we need to heed Paul's exhortation to exercise self-discipline, and exert our utmost in running this heavenly race. Just as many of the Israelites succumbed to sin, we could easily do the same if we are not careful.

However, since God has redeemed us through baptism and continues to nourish us with His spiritual food and drink, we are not alone on this journey. The passage concludes with a promise that our faithful God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape (v. 13). Thus, victory over sin is assured to all believers who are willing to resist temptation by God's merciful help.

# 1 Corinthians 12:12–13

12 *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

13 *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. “Baptized by one Spirit” is a reference to the sacrament of baptism
- b. It is the Spirit who baptizes
- c. Baptism is the means by which we are incorporated into Christ’s body
- d. Baptism unites believers

## 2. SETTING

The overarching theme of this chapter is the unity of the body of Christ. While there are many kinds of gifts in the church, there is only one Spirit. It is in this context that Paul writes about the common experience of being baptized by one Spirit into one body.

## 3. COMMENTARY

- a. Baptized by one Spirit

*ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι* have been translated either in a locative sense, “in one Spirit,” or in an instrumental sense, “by one Spirit,”

implying the Spirit as the agent. When John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water (ἐν ὕδατι),” water is the element in which the person is immersed. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, “All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ),” the cloud and the sea are the elements in which the baptism took place. On the other hand, ἐν τῷ πνεύματι in 1 Corinthians 12:9 is understood as “by the Spirit,” since in this context the Spirit is the active agent who distributes the gifts as He wills (cf. 1Cor 12:11). In this sense, we can say that it is the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into the body of Christ. However, the two alternative translations are not mutually exclusive. For our baptism by the Spirit is also in fact baptism in the Spirit.

What is this baptism referring to? Comparison with other passages suggests that Paul means the sacrament of baptism. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that they were washed in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Acts 2:41, where it records that those who received the word were baptized, also indicates that baptism is the occasion in which believers are added to the body of Christ. Thus we may say that when we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized by one Spirit.

b. Baptized into one body

When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His body, the church. Thus baptism brings us into not only an individual relationship with Christ but also a corporate relationship with all other believers in Christ. Through baptism, we are added to the church and become members of Christ’s body (cf. Acts 2:41). Since the church consists of those who have been purchased by God with His own blood (Acts 20:28), baptism is the process through which God’s people are incorporated into Christ’s body—for in baptism we are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

c. Baptism as a basis of unity

Paul appeals to the Corinthians for unity by reminding them that despite the diversity of gifts they have received, they were

all baptized by one Spirit into one body and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. Baptism encompasses all believers, regardless of race or status, for we have all been baptized by the same Spirit into the same body. As diverse in background and function as the members of this body may be, the fact that they have all been redeemed by the blood of Christ and brought into the body of Christ means that no distinction should ever be so great as to divide them.

# 1 Corinthians 15:29

*29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Two interpretations of baptism for the dead have the strongest textual support:
  - i. vicarious baptism
  - ii. baptism with the hope of reuniting with a departed loved one
- b. Paul refers to such a practice to support the resurrection of the dead, not necessarily to endorse the practice itself

## 2. SETTING

To refute those who claimed that there is no resurrection of the dead, Paul argues that the resurrection of the dead is fundamental to the Christian faith. If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen, and all followers of Christ have believed in vain. But since Christ is risen, the resurrection of the dead will certainly be a reality at the coming of Christ. After presenting the main argument, Paul uses short statements to support the resurrection of the dead. The first of these is the reference to the baptism for the dead. Such baptism would be meaningless if indeed the dead are not raised.

## 3. STRUCTURE

Paul's chain of proof consists of these main parts:



- a. The testimony of Christ's resurrection (15:1–11)
- b. The futility of our faith if there is no resurrection (15:12–19)
- c. Christ the firstfruits and the resurrection in the end (15:20–28)

Following this chain of proofs are three short arguments against the denial of the resurrection:

- d. What will they do who are baptized for the dead?
- e. Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?
- f. Why not indulge in a life of pleasure?

#### 4. COMMENTARY

Paul writes about those who were baptized for the dead to counter the denial of the resurrection. This reference to such a baptism is unique in Scripture, and we have no historical report that sheds light on the nature of this practice during the time of the apostles. Our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 will therefore be based mainly on the text of the passage.

The meaning of “baptized for the dead” depends on how the preposition ὑπέρ with the genitive (“for”) is translated. Consider the following two alternatives:

- a. Vicarious baptism (Baptism “in place of” the dead)

In the New Testament ὑπέρ with the genitive is used in different contexts to carry varying shades of meaning, including “to intervene for someone” (Rom 8:31); “to be concerned about someone” (Php 1:7; 4:10); “to sacrifice for someone,” particularly Christ’s atoning sacrifice (Rom 5:8; 1 Thess 5:10; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 3:13); or “on someone’s behalf” (Phm 1:13; 2 Cor 5:20). But broadly speaking, the preposition is generally used in a sense of representing, substituting, or acting in the interest of someone. Thus βαπτίζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν with a normal usage of ὑπέρ means “those who are baptized in the place of the dead.”

What can we know about the purpose and administration of such a baptism at that time? Since no reference to vicarious baptism can be found in the writings of the apostolic fathers,

we are not able to know its precise nature. But later practices from the second and third centuries by heretical groups were probably developments from the practice that Paul mentions, if this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 is correct.

Chrysostom (AD 347–407) writes about the rite of vicarious baptism among the Marcionites, a Gnostic group considered as heretical.

Or will ye that I should first mention how they who are infected with the Marcionite heresy pervert this expression? And I know indeed that I shall excite much laughter; nevertheless, even on this account most of all I will mention it that you may the more completely avoid this disease: viz., when any Catechumen departs among them, having concealed the living man under the couch of the dead, they approach the corpse and talk with him, and ask him if he wishes to receive baptism; then when he makes no answer, he that is concealed underneath saith in his stead that of course he should wish to be baptized; and so they baptize him instead of the departed, like men jesting upon the stage.<sup>91</sup>

Epiphanius also reports about the Marcionites:

In this country—I mean Asia—and even in Galatia, their school flourished eminently and a traditional fact concerning them has reached us, that when any of them had died without baptism, they used to baptize others in their name, lest in the resurrection they should suffer punishment as unbaptized (Heresies 8:7).<sup>92</sup>

From Asia and Gaul has reached us the account [tradition] of a certain practice, namely that when any die without baptism among them, they baptize others in their place and in their name, so that, rising in the resurrection, they will not have to pay the penalty of having failed to receive baptism, but rather will become subject to the authority

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91 Schaff, P. (1997). *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. XII. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*. (244). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

92 Tvedtnes, John A. *Baptism for the Dead: The Coptic Rationale*.  
[http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Baptism\\_for\\_the\\_Dead\\_the\\_Coptic\\_Rationale.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Baptism_for_the_Dead_the_Coptic_Rationale.html)

of the Creator of the World. For this reason this tradition which has reached us is said to be the very thing to which the Apostle himself refers when he says, “If the dead rise not at all, what shall they do who are baptized for the dead?” (Epiphanius, *Against Heresies* 1, 28, 6, in PG; 4:384)<sup>93</sup>

The fourth canon of the Synod of Hippo, held in 393, states, “The Eucharist shall not be given to dead bodies, nor baptism conferred upon them.” This decision was confirmed in 397 in the sixth canon of the Third Council of Carthage. These rulings indicate that some Christians were practicing vicarious baptism.<sup>94</sup>

- b. Baptism with the hope of reuniting a departed loved one (baptism “for the sake of” the dead)

ὕπέρ with the genitive is sometimes used in a final sense: “for the sake of” (e.g. “the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains,” τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὑπὲρ οὗ πρεσβεύω ἐν αλύσει, Eph 6:19, 20; “for your consolation and salvation,” ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας, 2Cor 1:6; “for the truth of God,” ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ, Rom 15:8; “for [His] good pleasure,” ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας Phil 2:13).

ὕπέρ is also used to denote the cause or reason: “on account of,” “because of”<sup>95</sup> (e.g. “for My name’s sake” ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου, Acts 9:16; “giving thanks always for all things,” εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων, Eph 5:20; “glorify God for His mercy,” ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν, Rom 15:9; “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times,” ὑπὲρ τούτου τρις τὸν κύριον παρεκάλεσα, 2Cor 12:8).

If Paul was using the preposition in this sense, he might have in mind those who were baptized on account of their departed loved ones with the hope of meeting them again in heaven.

The Scriptures teach that a person is baptized for the forgiveness of his sins. Paul’s mention of the baptism for the dead

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93 Nibley, Hugh. Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times. [http://www.lightplanet.com/mormons/temples/baptism\\_ancient\\_nibley.html](http://www.lightplanet.com/mormons/temples/baptism_ancient_nibley.html)

94 John A. Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead: The Coptic Rationale,” The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, [http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Baptism\\_for\\_the\\_Dead\\_the\\_Coptic\\_Rationale.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Misc/Baptism_for_the_Dead_the_Coptic_Rationale.html).

95 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 8:514.

does not endorse either vicarious baptism or baptism on account of a departed loved one. He simply cites those who were baptized for the dead to argue that baptism for the dead indicates a future resurrection. If the dead do not rise at all, such a baptism would be pointless.

## Galatians 3:26–29

*26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

*27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

*28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

*29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

### 1. KEY POINTS

- a. We put on Christ when we are baptized into Christ
- b. Baptism and faith in Christ are inseparable
- c. Those who are in Christ are
  - i. the sons of God
  - ii. one, regardless of race, social status, or gender
  - iii. Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise

### 2. SETTING

In an earnest effort to bring back the erring Galatians, who had been led to believe in the necessity of keeping the law, Paul demonstrates that we become heirs of Abraham by faith, not by keeping the law. Whereas the law places us under a curse, Christ has redeemed us from the curse so that through faith in Christ, we might receive the blessing promised to Abraham. Christ is the Seed of Abraham, to whom God's promise of inheritance was made. Therefore, God's promise can only be received in Christ and not through keeping the law. Believers in Christ are God's

sons and heirs by faith in Christ and by putting Him on through baptism.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Putting on Christ

“Put off” or “put on” are metaphorical expressions for renouncing or assuming a certain identity or way of conduct. Paul exhorts the believers to put off sinful conduct, reminding them that they have put off the old man with his deeds. Furthermore, they are to put on the new man created according to God’s image (Eph 4:20–24; Col 3:8–14). Similarly, in Romans 13:14, Paul exhorts the believers to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is an imperative to imitate Christ’s character in daily living.

There is yet another type of putting off and putting on in reference to the believer’s baptism. It is a decisive transformation of the believer’s spiritual status by the hand of God. Paul writes, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col 2:11, 12). God buries our old man with Christ in baptism, thus putting off the body of the flesh. Here, in verse 27, we read that the believer puts on Christ when he is baptized into Christ. In place of the old man, which has been crucified in baptism, we are raised with a new life and a new identity in Christ.

Two other descriptions in this passage parallel the thought of putting on Christ, namely “in Christ Jesus” (v. 28) and “Christ’s” (v. 29). To put on Christ is to be united with Christ, to be in Him, and to belong to Him.

We are baptized into Christ (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27). We enter into a union with Christ, being crucified with Him, buried with Him into His death, and raised together with Him (Rom 6:4, 8; Col 2:11–13). In baptism, our sins are washed away on account of the atoning work of Christ, and we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Having been incorporated into

Christ through baptism, we obtain a new standing before God. We are found in Christ, not having a righteousness of our own, but the righteousness that is from God by faith (1Cor 1:30; 2Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; Isa 61:10). The result of being in Christ is that we become Christ's (1Cor 3:23; 15:23; 7:22; 2Cor 10:7; Gal 3:29; 5:24). We belong to Christ and we are to live our lives for Christ.

b. Baptism and faith

In verse 26 Paul tells the believers that they are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Then he continues in the next verse, "for you as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (v. 27). The word γὰρ ("for") connects the two sentences and makes the statement in verse 27 the reason for the statement in verse 26. Since we have put on Christ through baptism into Christ, we are sons of God through faith in Christ. Baptism into Christ and faith in Christ are parallel and inseparable. Faith and baptism are integral parts of receiving Christ and becoming His. We cannot exalt one and dismiss the other. We become sons of God through faith, and baptism is the moment when we put on Christ and receive this sonship through faith.

It is remarkable that Paul does not hesitate to associate baptism with the believer's position in Christ and his adoption as a son of God in a book where he insists on faith as the means to justification. Paul has been vigorously refuting the Judaizers' claim that being sons of Abraham entailed keeping the law. He quotes from Scripture to show that the law does not justify and the works of the law place men under a curse. Now that Christ has come, we are no longer under the law. To be justified and become heirs of God's promise, we must receive Christ through faith. He concludes, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (v.26). Who are they who have become sons of God through faith? They are those who have been baptized into Christ. The fact that the Scripture places baptism in such a close connection with faith clearly demonstrates that baptism is not of the works of the law, but of faith. In baptism it is not man who works. He is simply the recipient of God's

grace, through which he is united with Christ and thereby saved.

c. Outcome of baptism into Christ

Having put on Christ through baptism, we are identified with Christ and are in Him. Being in Christ affords us a new status, and we can enjoy the blessings that come with this status.

i. Sons of God

God sent forth Jesus Christ His Son to redeem those who are under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal 4:4, 5). Through faith in Jesus Christ and union with Him, we become sons of God.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites are called the children of God (Ex 4:22, 23; Deut 14:1, 2; 32:5, 6, 19, 20; Isa 1:2–4; 30:9; 43:6, 7; 63:8; Jer 31:20; Hos 2:1; 11:1, 2). The term “sons/children of God” denotes a special identity of being the chosen people of God and God’s treasured possession.

In the New Testament, the designation of sons of God or children of God is applied to believers of Jesus Christ, and is closely related to one’s redemption and eternal life. Those who receive Christ and believe in His name are born of God and given the right to become children of God (Jn 1:12, 13). Called and predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God, they await the final glory and redemption (Rom 8:19–21; Eph 1:5; cf. Lk 20:36; Heb 2:10).

Since being sons of God means being born of God, it is not surprising to read in Galatians that Paul speaks of baptism as the defining moment of this new status. Baptism is the washing of regeneration through which we are born again of God and become sons of God. And after we have been adopted as sons of God, God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” (Gal 4:6).

Furthermore, we are able to be sons of God because of Christ’s redemption. As it is stated, “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as



sons” (Gal 4:4, 5). The price of redemption is the blood of Jesus Christ, which washes away our sins when we are baptized into His name. Once again, our baptism into Christ marks the beginning of this new divine status.

ii. One in Christ

Baptism into Christ results in unity in Christ. Distinctions of race, social status, and gender are irrelevant to a person’s spiritual standing in Christ. Everyone who accepts Jesus Christ by faith becomes an integral part of Christ’s body. Through the blood of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God, we have been brought into a new order of existence where we are not only given the same noble status but also united as one.

iii. Abraham’s seed and heir according to the promise

In Galatians, Paul writes about the status of believers as sons of God in the context of God’s promise to Abraham. God promised Abraham that His blessing would come to Abraham and his offspring. Thus, being sons of Abraham means partaking in God’s blessing and becoming the people of God. Contrary to the claim of those who advocated justification by keeping the law, it is not those who keep the law who are Abraham’s seed—God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise, not by works. No one can be justified by the law, and all who are of the works of the law are under a curse. But Christ came to redeem us from the curse of the law. In Christ alone, who was Abraham’s seed and to whom God’s promise was made, can we become Abraham’s seed. And as Abraham’s seed, we are also heirs to God’s promised blessing. Just as God declared in His gospel message to Abraham, “In you all the nations shall be blessed” (Gal 3:8), Abraham’s seed would encompass people of many nations. All who accept Christ by faith and are baptized into Christ, regardless of race or nationality, are Abraham’s seed and heirs.

# Ephesians 4:4–6

- 4 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;*  
5 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*  
6 *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism is a basis for the unity of the church
- b. The inclusion of baptism in this context highlights its importance
- c. Meaning of “one baptism”

## 2. SETTING

Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus about the exceeding riches of God’s grace they have received in Christ. Although they were once Gentiles, having no part in God’s covenant, they have now been brought into the household of God through the blood of Christ. This is according to the mystery that has now been revealed to the holy apostles and prophets—that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of God’s promise in Christ through the gospel (Eph 3:6).

In the latter half of the epistle, Paul urges the believers, in view of such great mercy from God, to walk worthy of their calling. In the body of Christ, all believers are to bear with one another and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:2, 3). This call to love and unity leads to the current passage, which

reveals the basis of unity in Christ. Upon this foundation, Paul demonstrates how the diverse gifts in fact work together to serve a single purpose.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Baptism and unity of the church

The seven “one”s in this passage—“one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all”—describe the unity of the church. This spiritual unity is not achieved by those who join the church, although they are to maintain it (v. 3). It is the work of God, and the very nature of the body of Christ. Therefore, baptism, as part of this divine provision, unites all believers. We who have been baptized into Christ are united with Christ and members of His body. We have all become one in Christ regardless of our nationality, status, or gender (Gal 3:27, 28). While we have been given diverse functions as members of this body, we have nevertheless been baptized into the same body. We are integrally joined with one another so that no one can be independent of others (Eph 4:7–16; 1Cor 12:12–30).

#### b. The importance of baptism

It is striking to see baptism mentioned alongside the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the hope of our calling, our Lord, faith, and God the Father. They all pertain to God Himself and His saving grace. In light of this passage, baptism is far from a mere man-made formality. It is not a subjective human act. Neither is it just one of the good deeds Christians are commanded to carry out. As we have just seen, the unity of the Spirit is established by God; therefore baptism is also the work of God. Every member of the house of God receives the one baptism instituted by God.

The fact that baptism is mentioned as part of the foundation of church unity further teaches us that baptism is not optional for believers. It is taken for granted that all believers in the body of Christ have been baptized into Christ. If some believers

in those days were unbaptized, baptism would not have been listed as an element that unifies all believers.

c. Meaning of “one baptism”

What constitutes the “one baptism” Paul has in mind in this passage? Does it mean that there is only one valid form of baptism? Or is it referring to a once-in-a-lifetime baptism?

In the context of this passage, the word “one” connotes a single unifying attribute. Just as there is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, etc, and all believers share in the same, there is only one divinely instituted baptism through which all believers are brought into the body of Christ. While our gifts and functions may be diverse, all of us have undergone the same experience of salvation.

Although the subject in discussion is not the correct form of baptism, baptism is not to be performed in any manner according to the individual’s belief or preference. Instead, it should remain in the larger framework of unity. Baptism is administered in the one body of Christ, the church, under the witness of the one Spirit. It is received with the one hope and one faith. Its goal is to become united with the one Lord and have access to the one God and Father of all. Thus, the Bible does not know of a baptism that has a wide variety of modes and is administered by different denominations with different beliefs and spiritual experiences. Instead, baptism is solely to be performed and received in the one church sent by the one Spirit of God.

# Ephesians 5:25–27

*25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,  
26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,  
27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The washing of water is a reference to baptism
- b. Baptism is the means for sanctification and cleansing
- c. The effect of baptism is founded on Christ's sacrifice
- d. It is Christ who washes the church
- e. Baptism is connected with the word

## 2. SETTING

Paul exhorts the believers to walk in a new way of life, in view of God's calling. Christ should take the central place in every facet of a believer's life. In his instructions to the husbands and wives, Paul models Christian marriage after the relationship between Christ and His church. The current passage records the command to the husbands to love their wives, using Christ's love for the church as the ultimate example. It mentions baptism as the means by which Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church.

### 3. STRUCTURE

The statement that Christ gave Himself for the church is followed by two ἵνα (“in order that”) clauses, which indicate the two-fold purpose for Christ’s sacrifice.

### 4. COMMENTARY

- a. The washing of water is a reference to baptism

According to this passage, Christ gave Himself for the sanctification and glorification of the church. The means by which He sanctifies and cleanses the church is the washing of water by the word.

Is this washing a reference to baptism or a figure of speech for a spiritual bath? Since this washing is performed by Christ on the church as a whole, it may seem as if it is a once-for-all spiritual washing which took place when Christ offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice. However, the explicit mention of water precludes such an interpretation and clearly indicates a reference to baptism.<sup>96</sup> The definite articles before both “washing” and “water” (“the washing of the water”) makes the reference even more specific—it is not just any washing with water in general, but the washing that is performed in the baptismal water.

The word λουτρόν (“washing”) is also used in Titus 3:5, where it speaks of the washing of regeneration—also a reference to baptism. It is a noun form of the verbs λούω (“wash”) and ἀπολούω (“wash away”), the latter of which is used in Acts 22:16 when Ananias urged Paul to be baptized and wash away his sins. Since the purpose of baptism is for the remission of sins, it is naturally called a washing.

- b. Baptism is the means for sanctification and cleansing

The first aspect of the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice for the church is that He might sanctify her. This sanctification process is by way of cleansing the church (“that He might make her holy, having cleansed...”, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθάρισας, v.

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<sup>96</sup> See the commentary on John 3:1–15 for the use of the word “water” as a reference to baptism.

26). Specifically, the means through which Christ cleanses the church is the washing of water by the word. Thus through baptism Christ accomplishes the cleansing and sanctification of the church. Christ's atoning blood cleanses the believers of their sins during baptism, consecrating the church as holy unto the Lord.

c. The effect of baptism is founded on Christ's sacrifice

It is important to note that the cleansing effect of baptism is derived from the sacrifice of Christ. Christ laid down His life in order that the church may be cleansed and sanctified. On the cross He laid down His life to open the fountain of cleansing. In baptism He washes away the sins of the believer. The blood that He shed on the cross now cleanses the baptized through the washing of water in baptism. Hence baptism in no way opposes or detracts from the cross of Christ, because its very foundation is the sacrificial death of Christ.

d. It is Christ who washes the church

The focus of these few verses is how Christ loves the church. All the actions are the actions of Christ. He loved her, gave Himself for her, sanctifies her, cleanses her with the washing of water by the word, and presents her to Himself a glorious church. The cleansing of the church through baptism is the work of Christ, not the work of any human being. It would therefore be wrong to consider baptism as a human endeavor to achieve salvation. Instead, it is a divinely appointed means through which God bestows His grace on sinners.

e. Baptism is connected with the word

The washing of water that Christ performs is "in word" (ἐν ῥήματι) (v. 26). The "word" here could mean the word of the gospel that calls for faith and brings salvation (cf. Jn 6:63; Acts 11:14; Rom 10:8; Heb 6:5; 1Pet 1:25). Baptism goes hand in hand with the preaching of the gospel and the acceptance of the word by faith (cf. Mk 16:15, 16; Acts 8:35-37). Thus, the word takes a central role in the administration and reception of baptism. Those who are baptized ought to receive the word of faith and continue to abide in the word.

# Colossians 2:11–13

- 11 *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,*  
12 *buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*  
13 *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The body of the sins of the flesh is put off in baptism
- b. We are buried and raised with Christ in baptism
- c. Baptism is the work of Christ
- d. Baptism is closely connected with faith

## 2. SETTING

In his epistle Paul guards the believers in Colosse against anyone who might cheat them “through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8). He emphasizes the supremacy of Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9) and “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). He reminds them that they have been made complete in Christ. Having died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, believers are no longer bound by the commandments and doctrines of men. The current passage describes in more detail how the believer dies



with Christ and is made complete in Christ, with baptism as the key moment in this process.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. The body of the flesh is put off in baptism

Paul writes that believers have been circumcised in Christ “by the circumcision of Christ” (v. 11). Like physical circumcision, this spiritual circumcision marks the individual as God’s possession and his entry into the community of God’s people. Whereas physical circumcision involves the removal of a small piece of flesh, the circumcision of Christ removes “the body of the sins of the flesh” (v. 11).

When does this circumcision take place? “Buried together” is an aorist participle that connects the burial in baptism with the circumcision of Christ. In other words, a believer is circumcised in Christ when he is buried with Him in baptism.

“The body of the flesh”<sup>97</sup> is the “old man” and the “body of sin” (Rom 6:6) described in the parallel baptism passage in Romans chapter 6. In baptism our old man is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Our sins and the sinful person are stripped off when we die together with Christ in baptism. This teaching coincides with other passages that speak of the remission of sins as the effect and purpose of baptism (cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16).

#### b. We are buried and raised with Christ in baptism

As in Romans chapter 6, Paul also uses συν- compound verbs to describe our union with Christ through baptism. We are buried with Him (συνταφέντες) in the sense that our sinful body dies and we are joined with Christ in the likeness of His death. Just as Christ died to sin, we are also dead to sin.

While our old man dies and is buried with Christ, we are also raised with Christ (συνηγέρθητε). ἐν ᾧ in verse 12 allows

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<sup>97</sup> “The body of the flesh,” τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, is found in a few early and generally more reliable manuscripts. “The body of the sins of the flesh” in the NKJV is based on *Texus Receptus*.

for two possible translations. The first option is to translate the statement as “in whom you were also raised with him.” “Whom” would be a reference to Christ. This translation parallels the structure of a previous statement in verse 11, “In whom you were also circumcised . . .” The second option, which is more likely, renders the statement as “in which you were also raised with him,” referring to baptism. This is a more natural reading because the thought flows from verse 11 to verse 12 and connects the two verses together. Furthermore, *συνηγέρθητε* (“raised with him”) is a closer parallel with *συνταφέντες* (“buried with him”) than with *περιετιμήθητε* (“circumcised”).

In baptism, we are buried and raised with Christ. Whereas we were dead in our trespasses, God has made us alive together with Christ by forgiving us of our sins (v. 13). After our old man is buried with Christ in baptism, we become alive to God, free from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:11). Thus a real change takes place in us during baptism through union with Christ and by the power of God.

c. Baptism is the work of Christ

Paul describes removing the body of the sins of the flesh as a kind of circumcision. But in contrast to physical circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands (Eph 2:11), this is an inward, spiritual circumcision made without hands. It is a circumcision of Christ. In other words, Christ Himself takes away the sins of the believer during baptism. Therefore, this passage clearly teaches that Christ’s saving work on the sinner takes place in baptism. Furthermore, baptism does not belong to the work of the law, which seeks justification before God by man’s good works. Instead, it is the acceptance of God’s grace through the work of Christ.

d. Baptism is closely connected with faith

In baptism we are raised with Christ through faith in the working of God (v. 12). Paul does not hesitate to discuss baptism and faith in the same breath because they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, there is an integral relationship between baptism and faith. Baptism requires faith in God’s saving

power—that just as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, He will also raise us up with Christ. Through such faith, the believer is made alive together with Christ in baptism. Once again, baptism is associated with faith rather than the work of the law.

# Titus 3:4–7

4 *But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,*  
5 *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy*  
*He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy*  
*Spirit,*  
6 *whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*  
7 *that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the*  
*hope of eternal life.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The washing of regeneration is a reference to baptism
- b. The washing that takes place in baptism is the means by which God saves us
- c. Baptism is not man's work of righteousness

## 2. SETTING

Paul urges Titus to exhort the believers to conduct themselves in a way that accords with godliness. The saving grace believers have received ought to be reflected in good works. In this passage we are reminded of our sinful past before we were saved. But by His grace God has saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. The reference here to the washing we receive in baptism indicates that this sacrament is an integral part of God's saving act.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Washing of regeneration

Paul describes here a spiritual washing that results in a new life. When does this washing occur? Can we be certain that there is a definite connection between this washing and the sacrament of baptism?

λουτρόν (“washing”), as used in the New Testament, is for the purpose of cleansing. With a few exceptions, the word denotes a spiritual cleansing from sin. Believers in Christ have been washed (1Cor 6:11). According to Ephesians 5:26 and Hebrews 10:22, the washing we have received involves water. In Acts 22:16, Ananias commanded Saul to be baptized and wash away his sins. Therefore, in the biblical perspective, God washes away the sins of the believer when he is baptized.

παλιγγενεσία (“regeneration”), is derived from the words πάλιν (“again, anew”) and γεννάω (“life, existence, birth”). It means coming back to life or being born again. This spiritual re-creation or rebirth is directly connected with baptism. A new life is possible only through the removal of sin, which is the purpose of baptism. As stated in Romans 6:3–6 and Colossians 2:11–13, we die together with Christ and are buried and raised with Him in baptism. Since the believer experiences this process of regeneration in baptism, the “washing of regeneration” must be a reference to the spiritual effect of baptism.

In John 3:3–8, our Lord Jesus teaches the necessity of being born from above (γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν) for entering the kingdom of God. This is a spiritual birth that involves water and Spirit. Likewise, the elements of water and Spirit are also found in the “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” in Titus chapter 3. Thus the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit is equivalent to being born of water and the Spirit, through which God saves us and brings us into His kingdom. Furthermore, the connection between Titus 3:5 and John 3:5 confirms that the washing of regeneration is a spiritual birth that results from the washing of water. In other

words, it is in baptism that the believer receives the washing of regeneration.

b. Baptism and salvation

God saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. διὰ (“through”) with the genitive is used in an instrumental sense here. It is used the same way in Romans 6:4 to speak of the instrumental role of baptism in placing us into Christ’s death, “We were buried with Him through baptism into death.” Here, in Titus, Paul states that God saved us by means of washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the washing away of sins resulting in a new spiritual life is an act of God in saving sinners. Since this washing takes place in baptism, as discussed previously, receiving God’s salvation necessarily calls for receiving baptism.

c. Baptism and grace

As this passage clearly states, our salvation is solely based on God’s mercy. Our works of righteousness play no part in contributing to it. But where should we place the sacrament of baptism? Is it considered a work of righteousness?

The Bible never assigns baptism to the category of human good works. In baptism, it is God who acts to effect cleansing. He washes away our sins, puts off the body of the sins of the flesh, buries us together with Christ into death, and raises us together with Christ. We are simply recipients of God’s salvation when we are baptized. By accepting the washing of regeneration in baptism, we are being justified by God’s grace and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (v. 7). Thus, when we receive baptism, it is not the merit of man’s work that saves us, but the effective working of God’s power according to His mercy.

# Hebrews 6:1–3

- 1 *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*
- 2 *of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*
- 3 *And this we will do if God permits.*

## 1. KEY POINT

- a. The term “baptisms” in this passage is to be distinguished from the sacrament of baptism

## 2. SETTING

The author notes in chapter 5 the immaturity of the believers whom he is addressing. They are dull of hearing and are unable to learn the deeper teachings. Although they ought to be teachers by now, they need to be taught the basics once again. In the present passage, the author urges them to depart from the starting point of the Christian faith instead of constantly needing instructions on the fundamentals. “The doctrine of baptisms” is listed here among the elementary principles concerning which they should not need to be taught again.

## 3. COMMENTARY

The passage does not elaborate on what βαπτισμῶν διδαχῆς (translated “the doctrine of baptisms”) constitutes, and we find no other references to it in the Scripture to give us insight on its meaning.

βαπτισμῶν is the plural form of βαπτισμός, a term that is rare in the New Testament (Heb 9:10; Mk 7:4; Col 2:12). It is used in Mark 7:4 for the Jewish ceremonial cleansings of utensils and in Hebrews 9:10 for Old Testament purification rites.

With the exception of Colossians 2:12, the New Testament always uses a different word, βάπτισμα (“baptism”), when referring to the baptism of John (Mt 3:7; Mk 1:4; 11:30; Lk 7:29; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3, 4) and the Christian sacrament of baptism (Rom 6:4; Eph 4:5; 1Pet 3:21). It is a specialized word unique to the New Testament, and the Scripture reserves the term for this practice.<sup>98</sup> βάπτισμα (“baptism”) is always used in the singular form, because there is only “one baptism” (Eph 4:5).

If, then, βαπτισμῶν διδαχῆς (“the doctrine of baptisms”) is not specifically about the Christian baptism, it is probably inclusive of different types of immersions or washings. That is, we may understand it as the instructions on the distinction between the various washings for purification in the Old Testament, the baptism of John, and the Christian sacrament of baptism. Such instructions would be particularly necessary for Jewish converts to the Christian faith.

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<sup>98</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 1:545.



# Hebrews 10:19–23

19 *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,*  
20 *by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is,*  
*His flesh,*  
21 *and having a High Priest over the house of God,*  
22 *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts*  
*sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*  
23 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who prom-*  
*ised is faithful.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. The expressions “hearts sprinkled” and “bodies washed” are an allusion to the cleansing in baptism
- b. The cleansing in baptism is rooted in the death of Jesus Christ
- c. We who have been cleansed through baptism are to draw near to God and hold fast the confession of our hope

## 2. SETTING

The sacrifices required by the law and offered continually year after year could not purify those who drew near (Heb 10:1). But Jesus Christ came and offered His body once for all. By this one sacrifice He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Heb 10:14). Sacrifices for sin are no longer necessary since our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus. In the present passage the author speaks of the privilege of believers. With His blood Christ has opened a new and living way by which we are

now able to enter the holy of holies. Having been thus purified, we are to draw near and hold fast the confession of our hope.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Sprinkled and washed

The author describes the purification of the believer as “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (v. 22). Having been purified, the believer is now able to enter into the holy of holies through the veil. This language is drawn from the purification rites in the Old Testament.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest had to wash his body in water and put on the holy garments before bringing the blood of the bull of the sin offering inside the veil (Lev 16:4). He then sprinkled the blood on and before the mercy seat to make atonement for himself and his house (Lev 16:14). He likewise atoned for the sins of the assembly of Israel with the blood of a goat (Lev 16:15–17).

We also find the washing with water and sprinkling of blood in the Lord’s instructions to Moses concerning the priestly ordination of Aaron and his sons:

*And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water... Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. And you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him. (Ex 29:4, 20, 21)*

In Hebrews chapter 9 the author cites the ceremonial cleansing of the Israelites that involved the sprinkling of blood (Heb 9:19–21; cf. Ex 24:4–8). After reading the Book of the Covenant, Moses took the blood of the offering and sprinkled it on the people, calling it the blood of the covenant.

With these Old Testament purification rites as the background, the author uses the imagery of the sprinkling of blood and washing with water to describe the purification of believers in Christ.

First, our hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience. The conscience is the inner conviction of man that bears witness to his standing before God (cf. Rom 2:15; 2Cor 1:12). The author has written earlier about the ineffectiveness of sacrifices in purifying the conscience. “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience...” (Heb 9:9).

*For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. (Heb 10:1–2)<sup>99</sup>*

But the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience that has been defiled by sin. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14). This cleansing by the blood of Christ is what the author has in mind when he writes “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (v. 22). By the once-for-all sacrifice of our Lord, our sins are forgiven and our hearts made pure. This momentous event takes place in baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3–11; Col 2:11–14). Thus Peter explicitly states that the cleansing of the conscience is the effect of baptism (1Pet 3:21).

The passage further describes the purification we have received as “our bodies washed with pure water” (v. 22). This description parallels “our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (v. 22). As we have noted, the language here is derived from the washing with water in the Old Testament ceremonial purification. The imagery of cleansing the body with “pure

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99 The word *συνειδησις* (“conscience”) is translated as “consciousness.”

water” is symbolic of the removal of sins (Ezek 36:25; cf. Num 5:17 where the expression “pure water” is used in a ceremonial sense). The reference here is not to the external characteristics of baptism, for baptism is not a washing of the body (1 Pet 3:21). However, it does depict the inward washing, which the external characteristic of baptism (immersion in water) symbolizes. In baptism, there is a spiritual washing, i.e., the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16). Other New Testament passages also speak of this washing (1Cor 6:11; Eph 5:25, 26).

We can see here that the purification we receive in baptism involves the cleansing of both the heart and the body, which together represent the entire person—including the inner thoughts and motives, as well as the outer conduct and character. Having been cleansed, we are to obey God from the heart and offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:12–18). The regeneration of the inner man through baptism also marks the beginning of a new way of life.

b. Cleansing with blood and water

“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb 9:22). God’s law stipulated cleansing with blood. Therefore, the shedding of blood was essential to atonement. But the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Heb 10:4). It served only as a reminder of sin, and foreshadowed the blood of Christ shed on the cross. It is the blood of Christ, which He shed by offering His body as a sacrifice of atonement, that perfects us once for all and opens for us the new and living way to God. Therefore, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (v. 22) alludes to the cleansing of the believer with the blood of Christ, which occurs during baptism. In baptism, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins.

While the expression “our bodies washed with pure water” (v. 22) is not to be taken literally, we can still understand it as a description of baptism in sacramental terms. This would be similar to Ephesians 5:26, where we read that Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church “with the washing of water by the word.” Although this is not a description of a physical

action Christ performs for the church, the deliberate mention of the word “water” (with the definite article in Greek, i.e., “the water”) reminds the reader of the sacrament of baptism. Otherwise, the word “water” would be unnecessary in this context. Thus, the washing of our bodies with pure water is to be read in a sacramental sense. If baptism were devoid of any spiritual effect, then describing it as the washing of the body with pure water would be problematic because physically, immersion in natural flowing water can hardly qualify as “washing with pure water.” But, taken in a spiritual sense, baptism in water is a washing with pure water because as our bodies are physically immersed in water, Christ also washes away all our sins and makes us pure spiritually.

c. Draw near and hold fast

Based on the fact that our hearts have been sprinkled and our bodies washed, the author offers us two exhortations: “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (v. 22), and “let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (v. 23).

The word προσέρχομαι (“approach, come to”) is found a few times in Hebrews (Heb 4:16; 7:25; 10:1; 11:6; 12:18, 22), describing the worshipper drawing near to God’s presence. It means trusting in God’s help through His mercy and grace (Heb 4:16) and dedicating ourselves to His service (Heb 12:28). Whereas our sins had separated us from God, we have now been purified and given access through the veil into God’s presence. We also have Christ as our High Priest to intercede for us. With a “true heart in full assurance of faith” (v.22) we ought to surrender ourselves completely to obey God’s will and trust that He will help us in the time of our need.

As people who have been purified by the blood of Christ, we are also called to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. This is an exhortation to remain steadfast in our faith in Christ. “The confession of our hope” (v. 23) is initially pronounced at baptism, when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 22:16). This faith, which we had at our baptism, must persist through our entire life. No trial or deceptive

philosophy should unsettle the confidence we have in Christ. If we hold the beginning of our hope to the end, then we are indeed partakers of Christ, and we will receive a great reward (Heb 3:6, 14; 10:35–39).

# 1 Peter 3:18–22

- 18 *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,*  
19 *by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,*  
20 *who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.*  
21 *There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*  
22 *who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Baptism saves
- b. Baptism results in a good conscience
- c. The saving effect of baptism is through the resurrection of Christ

## 2. SETTING

Peter exhorts the believers to endure when suffering for doing good (1Pet 3:17). He cites the prime example—Jesus Christ, who suffered and was put to death for righteousness' sake, but was raised to life and received all authority. Sins have pervaded the world as far back as the generation of Noah, but God has also given His grace of salvation to man as early as those days. The salvation of Noah and his family through water in fact foreshadows our salvation through baptism today.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### a. Baptism saves

A literal translation of ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σῶζει βάπτισμα in verse 21 is awkward because of its difficult syntax. If ὁ (“which”) refers to the immediate antecedent, ὕδατος (“water”), then a literal translation would be “[water], which also saves you now—the antitypical (corresponding) baptism.”

Compare the following translations for reference:

“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism.”  
(NKJV)

“Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism” (ASV)

“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you” (NASB)

“And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also”  
(NIV)

“Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you” (RSV)

“Also to which an antitype doth now save us—baptism”  
(YLT)

Regardless of which is the best translation, Peter’s message is clear: “Baptism saves you.” There is no indication in this passage that baptism is only symbolic of some divine action that precedes baptism. Baptism and salvation are inseparable.

Peter discusses the salvation of Noah and his family in a rebellious generation. He writes that they were saved through water. The instrumental function of water in the salvation of the eight souls parallels our salvation through baptism. The water that saved Noah’s family was the type; baptism is the antitype. τύπος is translated “type,” “example,” or “model.” Paul uses this word when he refers to the historical events that happened to the Israelites, which serve as examples for believers today (1Cor 10:6). He also uses it when speaking about Adam as a type of Christ (Rom 5:14). ἀντίτυπος, on the other hand, is the counterpart of τύπος. Hebrews 9:24 speaks of the earthly tabernacle as the ἀντίτυπος (“counterpart” or “antitype”) of



the true heavenly original (Heb 9:24; Ex 25:40). In the same way, salvation through baptism corresponds to the salvation of Noah's household through water. Just as God saved Noah's household through water in those days, He saves us through baptism today.

b. Baptism results in a good conscience

How does baptism save? The passage explains in the parenthetical clause: "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (v. 21).

σαρκὸς ἀπόθεις ῥύπου can be translated "the removal of filth from the body" (v. 21). Although water is normally used for removing the filth of the body, the effect of baptism does not reside in such an outward form of cleansing. Instead, the cleansing in baptism is inward and spiritual. ἐπερώτημα, found only here in the New Testament, has been translated as "answer," "appeal," or "request." In the LXX, the word appears in Daniel 4:17 in the sense of "response," "decision," or "verdict."

Some exegetes argue that this passage rules out the remission of sins through baptism. According to Robertson,

Baptism, Peter explains, does not wash away the filth of the flesh either in a literal sense, as a bath for the body, or in a metaphorical sense of the filth of the soul. No ceremonies really affect the conscience (Heb. 9:13f.). Peter here expressly denies baptismal remission of sin. But the interrogation of a good conscience toward God (ἄλλα συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερωτημα εἰς θεόν [alla suneidēseōs agathēs eperōtēma eis theon]). Old word from ἐπερωταω [eperōtaō] (to question as in Mark 9:32; Matt. 16:1), here only in N.T. In ancient Greek it never means answer, but only inquiry. The inscriptions of the age of the Antonines use it of the Senate's approval after inquiry. That may be the sense here, that is, avowal of consecration to God after inquiry, having repented and turned to God and now making this public proclamation of that fact by means of baptism (the symbol of the previous inward change of heart)."<sup>100</sup>

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100 A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

According to this interpretation, *σαρκός* (“flesh”) could denote the physical body in a literal sense or the sinful flesh in a metaphorical sense. Baptism removes neither dirt from the body nor sin from our souls. Instead, it is a public declaration of the sinner’s pledge toward God, and a symbol of a changed heart. The problem with this interpretation is that it begs the questions, “How does baptism save, if it is only a symbol of the salvation that has already taken place? And when does the ‘previous inward change of heart’ take place?” If, as Hebrews states, the purifying of the conscience by the blood of Christ is the saving act of God, and if, as Peter states in this passage, baptism saves, then we must not assign the former to a time prior to baptism.

Whether *ἐπερώτημα* means “appeal” or “pledge,” Peter’s basic point remains the same: “baptism now saves us.” How it saves us does not depend on the appeal or pledge of the sinner toward God, for no work of man is able to save us. The key here is that the appeal or pledge is that of a “good conscience.” Baptism saves because of the appeal or pledge of a good conscience. As we have studied before, the sinner’s conscience is evil and defiled (Heb 9:9; 10:2, 22; cf. Tit 1:15). What Robertson has overlooked is the fact that the “avowal of consecration to God” he speaks of is powerless to save if the conscience is still evil and defiled. It is only when our hearts are “sprinkled from an evil conscience” that we can draw near to God (Heb 10:22) and respond to God with a good conscience. This is precisely what God does through baptism—He purifies our conscience with the blood of Christ. It is in this sense that baptism saves us.

It would be best to read *οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν* (“not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God”) as a contrast between the outward cleansing of the physical body and the inward cleansing of our conscience. *σαρκός* (“flesh”) denotes the physical body, while *συνειδήσεως* (“conscience”) denotes the inner being. Baptism

saves, not in the cleansing of the body but in the purifying of the conscience.

- c. The saving effect of baptism is through the resurrection of Christ

Baptism saves us “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (vv. 21, 22). Christ’s resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God established Him as our Lord and Savior (Acts 2:29–36). The risen Christ has received all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18), and upon such authority baptism is effective for the remission of sins. Because of His resurrection, we may stand justified before God (Rom 4:25). The saving power of God, based on the historical event of the resurrection, now saves us through baptism. As we are taught in Romans 6:4, 5, 8–10 and Colossians 2:12, we receive a new life and are able to live a life of righteousness to God because we are raised with Christ in baptism. Our spiritual resurrection in baptism is united with the resurrection of Christ.

# 1 John 5:5–13

- 5 *Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*
- 6 *This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood.*
- 7 *And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth.*
- 8 *There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree.*
- 9 *If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has borne witness to his Son.*
- 10 *He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne to his Son.*
- 11 *And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*
- 12 *He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life.*
- 13 *I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.*

*(Revised Standard Version)*

## 1. KEY POINTS

- a. Jesus Christ came by water and blood
  - i. Historically, He was baptized in water and shed His blood on the cross
  - ii. Spiritually, He is present in the church through the washing of water and cleansing with His blood in baptism

- b. The Holy Spirit is an ever present witness, both during the life of Jesus as well as in the church today
- c. The water and the blood in baptism, along with the presence of the Holy Spirit, are God's witness to His Son

## 2. SETTING

The epistle discusses extensively the subject of being born of God. Chapter 5 centers on faith in the Son of God—a condition for being God's children. The result of such faith is eternal life and victory over the world. The present passage speaks of God's witness to His Son as grounds for our faith in the Son. Through the testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit, God bears witness that eternal life is in Jesus Christ.

## 3. STRUCTURE

Verse 5 states that faith in Jesus Christ is the key to overcoming the world. To assure believers that Jesus Christ is indeed trustworthy, the author turns their attention to the fact that God bears witness to His Son Jesus Christ. He discusses the content of God's testimony in verses 6 to 9 and the result of receiving the testimony in verses 10 to 12. The conclusion in verse 13 puts forth the author's purpose explicitly—to let the readers know that they have eternal life through faith in the Son of God.

## 4. COMMENTARY

### a. Water and blood

To help strengthen our faith in Jesus, the author wants us to ponder who He is. He is the one who "came by water and blood" (v. 6). But what does this description mean?

#### i. Historical perspective

According to Hebrews 10:5–7, Christ came into the world to do God's will. At both of the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry, i.e., His baptism and death, we see a clear demonstration of His submission to God's will. From His

baptism in water to the shedding of His blood on the cross, Jesus offered Himself entirely to God's service.

Mark 1:9 records that Jesus came and was baptized into the Jordan by John. Baptism marked the coming of Jesus as He began His public ministry. He was baptized as the obedient Son of God and thus identified Himself with believers who would follow His footsteps. In this sense Jesus came by water.

Jesus came "not with the water only but with the water and the blood" (v. 6). The Lord Jesus not only submitted to God in baptism at the beginning of His ministry, He ultimately fulfilled God's will and offered Himself on the cross as the sacrifice of atonement. With His own blood He is able to cleanse believers from sin. He is indeed the Redeemer and Savior. The author's emphasis on this fact was probably to counter heretics who denied Jesus' divinity (cf. 1Jn 4:2, 3). The ministry and personal sacrifice of Jesus fully demonstrated that Jesus was the Son of God.

ii. Spiritual perspective

The water and the blood not only bore witness in history to Jesus' divinity, they continue to bear witness for the believers through baptism. Note the following textual observations:

1. The description "This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ" (v. 6) is not restricted to a historical occurrence. ἐλθὼν is an aorist participle, which does not indicate time but usually denotes action prior to the leading verb, whether the action is past, present, or future. Thus, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος is literally "This is the one having come through water and blood." The saving acts of Christ are ever present for believers through water and blood.
2. "Not with the water only but with the water and the blood" (v. 6) has the preposition ἐν, ("in") and the definite article τῷ, ("the"). Jesus Christ has come not in the water alone but in the water and the blood. The first

readers of this epistle understood what the water and the blood the author was alluding to were, and it was not a foreign concept for them to understand the expression as a reference to the baptism they had received. In the water of baptism, there is also the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse away every sin. In baptism, believers experience the presence and saving power of the Son of God.

3. ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, literally “because three are the ones testifying” (v. 8), has the progressive verb εἰσιν (“are”), and the progressive participle, μαρτυροῦντες (“testifying”). The testimony for Christ is a present and continuous reality. The water and the blood in baptism today continue to testify for Jesus Christ just as they once did when Jesus was baptized and crucified.

The mention of water, blood, testimony, and truth presents a striking parallel with John 19:34, 35. There, the author testifies to the extraordinary phenomenon in which blood and water came out of Jesus’ side, and he stresses that his testimony is true so that the reader may believe. In the same manner that Eve was created out of Adam’s side, the church is created out of the side of Christ. The blood and water that flowed from the side of Jesus on the cross opened the fountain of cleansing for the church. Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church with the washing of water by the word, and this washing of water is effective because of Christ’s blood (Eph 5:25, 26).

Many commentators deny any connection between the present passage with John chapter 19 by noting that the order of “water” and “blood” is reversed here. But to a community which had experienced baptism firsthand and readily understood “water” as a reference to baptism (be it the baptism of Jesus or the baptism administered by the church), the phrase—literally “not in the water alone, but in the water and the blood” (v. 6)—would simply emphasize that baptism is no mere immersion in water, but it is effective for cleansing through the blood of Christ. On the other

hand, the eyewitness account in John chapter 19 naturally mentions blood first because blood was expected, whereas the presence of water was a miracle (see commentary on John 19:31-37).

b. The Spirit is the witness

The Holy Spirit testifies to the fact that Jesus Christ has come through water and blood. When the Lord Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, He said, “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (Jn 15:26).

- i. Historically, the Holy Spirit bore witness to the incarnate Christ (1Tim 3:16). He descended upon Jesus like a dove at His baptism as a witness that He was the Son of God (Jn 1:32-34). It is also the eternal Spirit through whom Christ offered Himself to God (Heb 9:14), and because the Spirit is eternal, He can testify to the timeless purifying effect of Christ’s blood.
- ii. Today, the Spirit continues to bear witness to Christ’s power to wash away sins in the church. The Holy Spirit is the authority upon whom the church exercises the forgiveness of sins in baptism (Jn 20:21-23). He is present in the church and in the sacrament of baptism, which the church administers. Thus, everyone who is baptized is baptized in one Spirit (1Cor 12:13). The Spirit testifies that Jesus Christ washes the believers with His blood when they are baptized.
- iii. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit dwells in each believer’s heart and bears witness inwardly. His anointing gives believers the assurance that they are in the Son (1Jn 2:26, 27).

Therefore, all in all, we have the joint testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. They agree in their testimony that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that in Him we have eternal life.

c. God’s testimony

The writer of the Fourth Gospel witnessed that blood and water came out of Jesus’ side on the cross, and he testified to what



he saw. Based on his testimony we believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood for our sins and His blood cleanses our sins through the washing of water. “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater” (v. 9). If the testimony of men in general—especially that which the fourth evangelist bore—lends credibility, how much more must we believe if we have the testimony of God!

God has testified to us through the Spirit, the water, and the blood that Jesus is the Son of God. All three witnesses are still present in baptism. This fact underscores the truth that baptism is not a human institution. By God’s testimony, the redemptive work of Christ in history is realized today in each believer when we are baptized into Christ. Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God encompasses receiving the historical and sacramental testimony of God. The result of accepting this divine testimony is eternal life in the Son.



# Personal Testimonies

# Testimonies Related to Baptism in the True Jesus Church

This section features testimonies of individual believers who experienced God's miraculous power through baptism into Christ. They witness to the truth of baptism as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit in the baptisms of the True Jesus Church.

Below are abstracts of the testimonies. The complete content of each testimony is published on the True Jesus Church web site. To view the most up-to-date online listing of testimonies related to baptism, please visit [tjc.org/001](http://tjc.org/001)

## WITNESSING THE BLOOD OF THE LORD JESUS

### The Lord Gives Me True Peace

Yearning to find true peace, Ya-Ling Chen began her quest for the truth in November of 1988 and was baptized the following year. The Lord opened her eyes and to see the blood of Jesus Christ during baptism.

### A Deaf and Mute Person Recounts God's Grace

Since birth, Jean-Shiang Fan suffered from a hearing disability. Unfortunately, because of various treatments to help cure her condition, she developed a speech impairment. Her life was bruised with embarrassment from her peers because of her disability. However, a turning point in her life occurred in 1983 when she heard about the True Jesus Church. Jean-Shiang recounts her experience of receiving the Holy Spirit and miraculous healing of her disability after receiving baptism.

### God Will Take Care of You

Chin-Shuan Wong was a devout Buddhist who heard the true church's teachings for the first time when she was studying abroad in the United States. In one of her company's outings, she met Brother Lin and his family, who were from the True Jesus Church in Chicago. After that meeting, she started seeking the truth in the true church.

In the month of January in 1993, she was baptized in ice-cold water. In her baptism, God used the vision of the precious blood to strengthen her faith. Through prayers of intercession for her family, she preached the gospel to her younger brother and led the entire family to belief and baptism.

### The Grace of Salvation Came upon My Family

Severely ill, En-Guang Qiu's father was near death before he received baptism. Because En-Guang was the only believer in the family, the process of his father's baptism was very difficult. The doctors refused to discharge him from the hospital because of his condition. However, En-Guang Qiu was determined to have his father be baptized in living water no matter what his father's health condition was. Through his hard prayers and supplication of the church members, God's power and grace was evident, and the doctors and family miraculously allowed his father to be baptized in his ill condition. During baptism, En-Guang and his two non-believer siblings saw the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Two hours after his baptism, En-Guang's father was called by the Lord.

### Counting God's blessings

Ms. Zhou grew up in a family that embraced the traditional Chinese religious faith. After marrying her husband, who was a believer, she started attending services at the True Jesus Church with her aunt. The night before her baptism, her child slipped, fell and injured himself during his shower, causing her to wonder if she should receive baptism. However, the Lord strengthened her faith. Both she and her child went forth to receive baptism the next day during which she saw the precious blood of the Lord. After baptism, she and her family received the abundant grace and protection of God; she even saw the Lord in a dream and a vision. Because of this, her faith has become even stronger with every passing day.

### Abandoning Falsehood and Returning to the Truth

Naixuan Li accepted her roommate's invitation to the True Jesus Church and experienced the wondrous grace of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus opened her eyes, and allowed her to see the precious blood of Jesus Christ during baptism. From that, she knew that the Lord Jesus Christ had shed His blood for her sins. It was a vision that comforted her and allowed her to experience the true and living God.

### I Witnessed the Lord's Blood

Wen-Yu Chang began to search for the truth of salvation in the True Jesus Church after going through many sufferings and questioning his former beliefs.

For a long time, Wen-Yu heard from some Christians of other denominations that baptists of the True Jesus Church released red ink into the water to turn it into red, falsely making people believe it was the blood of Christ. Wen-Yu set out to find out if this was true, and he experienced a miraculous discovery.

### God's Love and Power

In an unexpected incident, 14-year old Grace was diagnosed with aplastic anemia. It became so severe that she needed a bone marrow transplant. This trial that the Lord placed upon this family renewed their spirituality, and their long lost love for God. On the day of the baptism, Grace's parents saw the blood of Jesus Christ. After baptism, the paleness of Grace's face and coldness in her hands disappeared. Even more miraculous was when they went to the hospital to receive her weekly blood transfusion. The whole family was shocked to hear what the doctors found.

## DEMONS CAST OUT

### Peace through Faith

Lin Mann Chang was mentally unstable due to an early loss of her child. Through another person's witness, she came to believe in the Lord. Despite disturbance from the evil spirit, Lin Mann was baptized. After she was baptized, she became the child of God and was completely healed by the Lord Jesus.

### Heavy Burdens Lifted Away

For many years, Li Zhu Chang's husband was possessed by the devil. The devil robbed her household's peace and afflicted Li Zhu greatly through her husband. Li Zhu and her husband came to believe through a relative. Right before the baptism, the devil tried to stop Li Zhu's husband from receiving baptism and made him swim to the middle of the ocean. The pastors cast out the demons, and her husband swam back. After baptism, Li Zhu's husband was eventually healed. Through believing in Christ and receiving baptism, Li Zhu's heavy burdens were lifted away.

#### Overcoming Evil Spirits

For more than a year, an evil spirit was afflicting Crystal Lane's life. Her family visited Buddhist temples to seek help, but doing so only worsened her condition. After hearing and learning about Christ in the True Jesus Church, Crystal decided to receive baptism. Miraculously, after the baptism, the evil spirit left her and she was released from the devil's bondage. For the first time after more than a year, Crystal was able to sleep peacefully.

### VISIONS OF GOD'S GLORY

Why Are You Cast Down, O My Soul? And Why Are You Disquieted within Me?

Mr. Chengshan Li was stricken with cancer at a young age. During his treatment at the hospital, he and his wife came into contact with the True Jesus Church. However, due to the deeply rooted traditional faith he had, he was unable to accept the gospel. Members of the church continued to visit and show concern for him, and their love and patience moved him. Following a relapse, he came to seek the truth and was eventually baptized. Before the baptism, he was pale and could hardly walk on his own, but after the baptism, he was able to walk unsupported and his face even turned red and rosy. He had become such a different person that others also came to believe in the Lord when they witnessed this miracle.

#### Become a New Man

For a long time, Mr. Li refused to believe in the Lord even after his wife and children were baptized. Because of this, Mrs. Li and her daughter prayed daily that he might come to believe. During a relapse of his liver disease, when his Hepatitis B condition worsened, Mr. Li was hospitalized. Ministers and brethren continued to visit him, sharing the words of God with him and praying with

him. In one of the prayers, when a preacher laid hands on him, Mr. Li experienced a great surge of power, bringing him great comfort and joy, and all his worries were gone. During the baptism of Sis Li's husband, many deacons and brethren saw the glorious light of God. After baptism, he became a new man both physically and spiritually.

#### Called Out from the World

Richard Solgot was raised in a Catholic family all his life. It wasn't until he married his wife that he came in contact with the True Jesus Church. Many times, Richard's wife encouraged him to pray with her and their children, but he would always refuse and pray the way he was taught in Catholic school. However, during one prayer, the Lord opened his eyes and allowed him to see two visions. After these two visions, Richard was convinced that he had to be baptized to wash away his sins. Though Satan tried to stop him to be baptized, the Lord demonstrated His great power.

#### Africa Mission: Kenya

During a baptism in Kenya, the power of the Lord was great. An 18 year old woman who had a baby received water baptism. She was in deep distress and pain over the loss of her husband. But she found comfort in Christ and received the precious Holy Spirit during baptism.

### **EXPERIENCING HEALING**

#### A Gravely Ill Baby Healed After Baptism

Since his birth, Ko Khan Zhou was afflicted with colonic atresia, which could only be treated by surgery. Because of financial constraints and the fact that surgery did not guarantee a cure, Ko Khan's parents decided to entrust his health to the Lord Jesus. Through his parents' faith in God, Ko Khan received baptism. Under God's care, not only did he withstand chilly and wet weather during baptism, he was able to smoothly pass stool soon afterwards. God healed baby Ko Khan after his baptism.

#### The Most Competent Doctor

For ten years, Bao-Yu Chen had been in very bad health. She had seen many doctors and also taken a good deal of medicine, only to find that her illness became worst. At the time when she was in her life impasse, her married daughter came to visit her, telling



her about a highly competent doctor who is able to cure her and comfort her—Jesus Christ.

After hearing the gospel at the True Jesus Church, Bao-Yu realized that she had to be baptized to wash away her sins. Even though Bao-yu was still in very bad health, she was still determined to be baptized. Amazingly, after getting up out of the chilly water, Bao-Yu felt very warm, relaxed, and comfortable. Her health did not deteriorate. Instead, after baptism, Bao-yu fully recovered by the power of God.

#### Journey Full of Blessings

Not long after Enci was born, she suffered a lot of pain before and during bowel movements. Her parents took her to see many doctors and prayed to God, but there was no improvement. However, on the day she was baptized, she was completely healed.

#### He is the True Vine

J.Y. Wang was afflicted with arthritis. Her life became very heavy burdened and hopeless. She depended on pain killers, and even became addicted to them. Walking on the edge between life and death, she was saved by God's mercy, which started her journey of faith. By the power and grace of God, after baptism, she was able to completely stop taking pain killers even after twenty long years of dependence on them.

#### Only Holding On to Jesus

Mr. Hsiao had been a farmer since youth. He contracted multiple illnesses because he often overworked himself. After hospitalization, his situation got worse. Brothers and sisters from the church testified to him of the power and salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord opened his heart, Mr. Hsiao began to think about the meaning of life, and decided to be baptized despite his critical condition. After baptism, he recovered and was completely cured soon afterwards.

#### Triumphing Over Satan's Schemes

For many years, Zhu-Xia Lin's two children suffered from convulsions and foaming of the mouth. It was a very painful ordeal for the family. They were devout idol worshippers. However, her mother was a True Jesus Church member. By observing her mother's actions, she and her husband were moved and determined to seek God.

Before the baptism of her children, one of them had a big convulsion and was sent to the hospital. Zhu-Xia was very worried that her child and her family would not be able to be baptized. However, through the mercy of God, the whole family was baptized in the Lord. Miraculously, after the baptism and by the power of God, the two children were completely healed.

#### Crossing through the Valley of Death

Ah-Zhu Chen was bedridden for two years. She sought after many gods and went to many doctors to cure her illness. To her dismay, not only did her illness worsen at times, but she also became very hot-tempered. Because she became so hard to take care of, some of her family members gave up on her. Ah-Zhu even attempted suicide, but failed.

Days before her baptism, Ah-Zhu encountered many obstacles. She discovered a hard lump on her abdomen that caused so much pain that she couldn't get out of bed. Through prayers and care of brothers and sisters, her pain subsided a little. After Ah-Zhu rose up from the water after baptism, her pain as well as the hard lump were completely gone.

#### Seeing God's Grace among the Ordinary

Yue-Feng's grandmother's cataract was even healed when she saw the glorious light during baptism.

### OTHER

#### Daddy, Do Not Be Afraid!

After being diagnosed with lung cancer, Jingzhu Chai was very fearful of death. His daughter and son-in-law preached to him and he accepted Christ. It was very chilly on the day of the baptism. However, after the baptism Jingzhu testified that when he went into the water, the water was warm. Immediately after the baptism, he felt peaceful and joyful. A week and a half after the baptism, the Lord called him home.

#### An Eternal Paradise

Before Li-Man baptized into the Lord, she was a devout idol worshipper who had determined to become a Buddhist nun. However, before she could even become a nun, the Lord used various unusual events to call her to Him. After many prayers and care from the

brothers and sisters, the Spirit of the Lord moved Li-Man to be baptized. On the day of the baptism, the devil was shouting in Li-Man's ear, and it became so severe that she had headaches, started vomiting, and even fainted. But this did not stop her from being baptized. After the baptism, by the Lord's grace the voice in her head completely subsided.

#### The Calling of God

A lady received the Holy Spirit on her third visit to True Jesus Church. However, because of her parents' Buddhist beliefs, she was not able to get baptized. She was confused whether to obey her parents or to receive baptism. She cried out to God to reveal to her what she should do. Immediately, she saw a glorious cross. Instantly, she knew she had to receive baptism for the remission of her sins.

During her journey to receive baptism, she encountered an obstacle Satan put before her, but she was not shaken. When she received baptism, it marked a turning point in her life.







ISBN 978-1-930264-13-7



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