

Christian Baptism

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" For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom. 6:7).

"...Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16)

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Scripture quotations are taken from King James Version or New King James Version.

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Christian Baptism: Baptized Into Christ, Into His Death
" For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom. 6:7).

Summary: *Christian baptism is an act of faith in obedience to Christ's command. It is our confession that we are dead to sin, dead to self, dead to the world; and that we were in Christ when He died, was buried, and rose. We are identified with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are baptized into Christ, into His death, and therefore are joined to Him. We are His own possession.*

Introduction

Jesus Christ Himself was baptized, and He commanded His disciples to *"teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* Matt. 28:19. Baptism, therefore, is a divine institution, and is for every Christian. According to the Lord Jesus, John's baptism was of heavenly origin, not a human idea (Luke 20:4). It was the counsel of God (Luke 7:30). How equally true this is for the baptism in the Church!

The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ came to John to be baptized, saying, *"thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matt. 3:15). At His baptism, when He came up from water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him visibly like a dove. This pre-figured what was to be the experience of every believer as Peter declared in Acts 2:38. Did Jesus need to be baptized? He had no sin to confess to John as all the others who came for baptism. But He had righteousness to fulfill for our sake. He stood there in the water like one of us, for everyone of us, identifying Himself with us. He has left His foot- steps for us to follow. When He was baptized, all the onlookers thought that He was just another sinner. Only John knew better. It is now our turn to identify ourselves with the One who identified Himself with our fallen state, and yet knew no sin.

Not only did the Holy spirit descend upon Christ, but a voice came from heaven, saying, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17). Note that it was at Jesus' baptism that the Father made this declaration. We may safely believe that when any believer is baptized in water, there is certainly a testimony from heaven: God is pleased. Baptism is *"the counsel of God"* for us (Luke 7:30).

As you read on, you will see with clarity that baptism is not a formal ritual, but an act of simple faith and willing obedience with great spiritual significance. It is significant for what God has spoken concerning it, and what God has meant it to be.

John's Baptism and The Christian Baptism

John's baptism was valid only until the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. From that point on we have the Christian baptism. What is the difference?

John's Baptism of Repentance: John said God sent him to baptize. He baptized those who repented (turned away) from sin, and confessed their sins. He was preparing them for Jesus Christ. John exhorted them to live in a manner that showed their repentance was genuine.

The Christian Baptism: The Christian baptism is based on our Lord's words in Matt. 28:19,20. It began with the baptism of about 3000 people on the day of Pentecost. This was 50 days after the day the Lord rose from the dead, and 10 days after He ascended to the Father. On that day, Apostle Peter declared: *" 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). This declaration of the Apostle holds good for us today as it did for the 3000 on that great day. You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! You shall know in your heart that, for His Son’s sake, the Father is pleased with your repentance and faith.

Before we can come to baptism, we have to come to Christ, and be taught of Him. What does He teach us? When Jesus started preaching, some of the very first words He spoke were: *“Repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). Peter on the day of Pentecost also said: *“Repent.”* When our Lord said *“Repent and believe,”* He joined repentance and faith, not to be separated.

Please learn what genuine repentance and saving faith involve: You turn your face from sin, and set your face toward God. The prodigal son had faith that the father would forgive him and accept him. You also have faith that God would forgive you and accept you for Jesus’ sake. Your faith for salvation is entirely on God’s mercy revealed in Christ’s atoning sacrifice for you. The prodigal son started on his long journey back to the father’s house. Your journey, because of Jesus, is shortened by God’s mercy. God sent His Son looking for you, and the Son has come to where you are. As soon as you turn around, you are in the arms of the One who died for you. You are changed in such a way that you hate the sin you once loved! You forgive all who offended you in the past (Matt.6:14,15). You hasten to ask forgiveness from anyone you have offended in the past (Matt.5:23,24)! You restore without delay anything you owe or stole from anyone (Luke 19:8).

You are washed clean in the blood of Jesus Christ! God puts you in His Son, and, it is as if you have never sinned. Abiding there, in the Son, you experience the unspeakable grace that keeps you from sinning; just as the prodigal was embraced by the father, washed by the father, clothed by the father, and received into the house with festivity! This is what repentance and faith working together accomplish in a weary soul that comes to Jesus Christ. Such a person is ready to be baptized in water.

The preparation of a Person for Baptism

- Step 1: He is taught how to repent and believe. He repents, and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and confesses accordingly (Acts 2:37,38; Mark 16:15,16).
- Step 2: He is taught how repentance includes reconciliation with men and restoration of goods as necessary; these he willingly fulfills. He is taught that he has reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ; this he wholeheartedly believes. Thus he has a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21).
- Step 3: He is taught that baptism is for disciples (Matt. 28:19). Who is a disciple? He who commits himself to observe all things that Jesus has commanded (Matt. 28:20). A disciple denies -disowns- himself, forsakes all, takes up his cross and follows the Master (Luke 14:25-33). The candidate is taught that in being baptized he is baptized into Christ, and His death (see below), and, as he shares in Christ’s death, so he shares in His resurrection. He is taught to anticipate the *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2: 38).

How Old Should a Person be?

The Scriptures do not set an age for baptism. The candidate for baptism should be able to make a conscientious commitment (1 Pet.3:21) to begin the life of discipleship embodied in the three steps set forth above. We see the candidates of John's baptism "*confessing their sins*" (Matt.3:6) and "*coming*" (Matt.3:7) to his baptism. Though we do not set an age, we recognize that age is often an indicator of maturity and accountability. For this reason thirteen years of age or older may be considered as a guideline, but not a rule.

An older brother instructing for baptism should help the candidate to make the right decision. The parents also may help. Any delay (when necessary) in being baptized should only increase the candidate's appreciation for baptism as well as intensify his commitment.

Baptized Into Christ, Into His Death

In Romans chapter 6 we are taught that when one is baptized in water his faith is this: "Formerly I was dead in sin, but now by grace I am dead to sin, with Christ who died on the cross for me. I was in Christ when He died on the cross for me. As I am immersed in water, my old man (who loved to sin, and willingly sinned) is buried in the burial of Christ. I was in Christ when He was buried in the grave. I am baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), and into His death (Rom. 6:3). As I emerge out of the water, I am raised with Christ in His resurrection. I was in Christ when He rose from the dead. I have thus partaken of, and am identified with, my Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. I was in Christ when He ascended to the Father. I am His possession entirely. By faith I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which God gives to all who obey Him. Jesus Christ has freed me from the power of sin. By grace I will walk in obedience to Him. This is my covenant with my God in the blood of Jesus Christ who loved me and died in my place. From now on I walk by faith in the newness of life."

Who died on the cross with Christ? The old man (of the first Adam) in me who loved to sin and willingly sinned. This "knowledge," Rom. 6:6, keeps us in victory, if, we also "reckon," (Rom. 6:11), ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This "knowing" and this "reckoning" are both experienced in our life in the Spirit, when, as sons of God, we are led by the Spirit through daily trials and temptations. When tempted, we reckon in our heart: "Christ's death is mine. I am baptized into His death. I therefore choose to deny my own will, and do God's will." This involves suffering for the flesh (our human nature) that would rather do its own will. Jesus also experienced such suffering in His temptations (Heb. 2:18), having clothed Himself with a flesh like ours, and having been tempted like us in all points (Heb.4:15). Here we experience fellowship in the Spirit with the Lord who prayed, "*not my will, but thine, be done.*" We follow in His foot steps, and are kept from sinning (1 Peter 2:21,22). Step by step we learn obedience, and go on to perfection, in fellowship with the One who so walked in the days of His flesh, and was perfected for our sake (Heb. 5:8,9). Such a walk is possible only through most earnest prayers (Heb. 5:7) and great humility.

Water baptism is a single event, but being dead to sin with Christ and risen with Christ is a continuing, daily experience. Every time we exercise our faith (in the face of trials and temptations) praying: *Not my will, but Yours be done*, thus denying - disowning - ourselves for Jesus' sake, we are in some degree sharing in the death of Christ (death to sin). As we share in His death, we also share in His resurrection power in which we overcome sin and death. Such is the way - the New and Living Way into the Holiest - Jesus opened for us through His sufferings in the flesh (Heb. 10:19-22). The New and the Living Way is the way of obedience Jesus walked in the days of His flesh, all the way to the death on the cross. We follow Him in this way of obedience. Such obedience is rewarded with an abundant measure of the Holy Spirit upon us.

Such a walk prepares us to be counted fit to suffer hardships in our service for the body of Christ. This is a life in the school of obedience where the Spirit guides the disciples – students – along as He did our Lord in the days of His flesh.

Only The Dead Can Experience Resurrection

Jesus Christ saves us from the penalty of sins; this is the forgiveness of sins. He also saves us from the power of sin; this is the freedom from the sin that dwells in our human nature (flesh). This victory over the power of sin is attained by virtue of the resurrection power given to us through the baptism of the Spirit. Only the dead (dead to sin) can experience the resurrection. How crucial it is for us by faith to identify ourselves with the death of Christ! How crucial it is for us to come to Christ daily so that we may know how to “reckon” ourselves dead to sin! The Holy Spirit awakens us to this great need, and we are constantly drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ. When lust causes temptation, we “reckon” ourselves dead to sin. When the world attracts us, we “reckon” ourselves dead to the world. When our self - often in the form of pride - raises its head, we “reckon” ourselves dead to self. The Holy Spirit guides us. We learn to suffer in the flesh (“ *not my will, but Yours*”), and learn obedience, Heb. 5:8. By grace we increasingly experience the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Thus the faith we confessed in baptism is actualized in the daily situations of life. We experience oneness with the Lord, and we love Him more.

Who May Baptize?

John was sent by God to baptize, and Jesus said he was the greatest of all ever born till then. Jesus said that those who do and teach the Word of God are great in the kingdom of God, and he who humbles himself like a little child is the greatest. We are not to take lightly the administration of baptism. Who may baptize? Those who have had experiential knowledge of being dead to sin and risen with Christ; and, having been baptized in the Holy Spirit, walk in the newness of life. Such may teach others, prepare them for baptism, and administer baptism. Any Christian who has this testimony both in his heart and among the brethren may teach others and baptize. Such was the practice in the early Church, although in latter times only recognized ministers were to baptize.

The Baptismal Formula

While it is written in the book of Acts that the apostles baptized in the name of Jesus, we are not to assume that they decided not to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as some hold. It is indeed in the name of Jesus Christ (in the authority derived from His name) that we baptize when we, in obedience to His commandment, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The phrase in Matt. 28:19, “baptizing them in (into) the Name” “would indicate that the baptized person was closely bound to, or become the property of, the one into whose Name he was baptized.” Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words, page 99.

We may use the following words while baptizing: “***In the name of Jesus Christ, and according to His commandment, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.***” In so saying, we are indeed baptizing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, while keeping intact the words committed to us by Jesus affirming the great truth concerning the one true God: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament Types

The Ark of Noah: Read 1 Peter 3:20,21. The world perished in the flood, but eight souls entered the ark were saved. Christ is our ark, we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). We are as much cut off from the world and its evil ways, as those eight souls in the ark were from the world that perished. Though baptism is so simple an act, the faith we confess in baptism effects enormous change in us as far as our connection with the world's evil ways are concerned. For those who are baptized into Christ, the world - the world order, its values, its fashions, its ways - is under water, under God's judgment. We are crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to us. This is a progressive revelation that God's light leads us through, and we see the death of Christ working as a dividing line between us and the world.

The Passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea and their journeying under the cloud: Read 1 Cor. 10:1,2. In crossing the Red Sea, Israel was "*baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,...*" "*Baptized into Moses*" here means that they were united to Moses as their leader. This was a type of our being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) and joined to Christ as our Savior. We have left the world behind as Israel left Egypt. We have partaken of Christ by faith, as Israel ate the Passover. As the enemies were drowned in the Red sea, our old man is buried in baptismal waters.

True Repentance: Sinning Before or After Baptism

Tertullian (A.D. 145 – 220)

The baptismal washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by the faith of repentance. We are not washed *in order that we may cease sinning*, but *because we have ceased*, since in *heart* we have *been* bathed already. For the *first* baptism of a learner is *this*, a perfect fear; thenceforward, in so far as you have understanding of the Lord, faith *is* sound, the conscience having once for all embraced repentance. Otherwise, if it is (only) after the *baptismal* waters that we cease sinning, it is of *necessity*, not of *free-will*, that we put on innocence. Who, then, is pre-eminent in goodness? He who is not *allowed*, or he whom it *displeases*, to be evil? he who is *bidden*, or he whose *pleasure it is*, to be free from crime?...

And so it is becoming that learners *desire* baptism, but do not hastily *receive* it: for he who desires it , honors it; he who hastily receives it, disdains it:.. Whom would you judge worthier, except one who is more amended? whom more amended, except one who is more timid, and on that account has fulfilled the duty of true repentance? for he has feared to continue still in sin, lest he should not merit the reception of *baptism*...

But however, that most stubborn foe (of ours) never gives his malice leisure; indeed he is then most savage when he fully feels that a man is freed *from his clutches*; he then flames fiercest while he is fast becoming extinguished... he is never deficient in stumbling-blocks nor in temptations... If any do incur the debt of a second repentance, his spirit is not to be forthwith cut down and undermined by despair. Let it by all means be irksome to *sin* again, but let not to *repent* again be irksome: irksome to imperil one's self again, but not to be again set free. Let none be ashamed. Repeated sickness must have repeated medicine. You will show your gratitude to the Lord by not refusing what the Lord offers you. You have offended, but can still be reconciled. You have One whom you may satisfy, and Him willing.

-from *On Repentance by Tertullian, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III*

Infant Baptism

The apostles knew nothing of infant baptism. In later years when some wanted to baptize little children, Church fathers like the Tertullian [AD 145- 220] opposed it; yet it gained acceptance in time, and has come down to us through the centuries.

In the Old Testament infants were circumcised; in the New Testament infants were blessed. The circumcision of the Old Testament corresponds not to infant baptism as some have supposed, but to the circumcision of the heart, in the spirit, as is plainly taught in Romans 2: 29. The apostles of Jesus Christ did not institute infant baptism as corresponding to the circumcision of the Old Testament.

[Note: Though you were baptized as an adult, perhaps you were not sufficiently instructed before you were baptized. Here is my plea: Are you dead to sin? Ask the Lord to show you your true condition. Please read and learn the Scripture passages reviewed in this booklet, and take hold of the blessing.]

Historical Notes

1. Washing or bathing in water was a custom in most countries of antiquity as preparation for sacrifice, prayer or expiation of sin.
2. Jesus Christ Himself was baptized by John. Jesus' disciples baptized. Jesus did not baptize anyone.
3. John's baptism prepared people for Jesus, and was valid until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples. From then on we have Christian baptism (Matt. 28:19) of the believers witnessing their identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. This prepared the believers for the baptism of the Holy spirit. In Acts Chapter 19 (about AD 56) Paul rebaptized some disciples who were baptized after the day of Pentecost, but by someone who did not know about the Holy Spirit. Paul taught them about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and baptized them; then they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
4. "*In the early Church baptism was conferred by immersion.*" Dictionary of the Bible, John L. McKenzie, page 79. The apostles knew nothing of infant baptism. In later years when some wanted to baptize little children, Church fathers like Tertullian [AD 145- 220] opposed it; yet it gained acceptance in time, and has come down to us through centuries.
5. According to *Didache* (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, written at the end of the first century or middle of the second), baptism could be performed by pouring water over the head if no stream of running water or large amount of water was available. Only such as were baptized could partake of the communion.
6. During the early years of the Church, any anointed disciple who leads a person to Christ could baptize the convert. This changed in time, and only recognized ministers could baptize.
7. In our time some denominations that baptize infants would also baptize the adults by immersion if so requested by the believer.

Please share these notes with seekers. Joseph Arthungal, joseph.arthungal@gmail.com, www.graceforgodliness.org.