

The Truth About Baptism

By R.S. Neville

What is Baptism?

Christian baptism is a sacrament of the Church. Sacraments are sacred practices that carry a pictured meaning. It is one way we testify to Jesus. Baptism represents a great meaning to Christians. In it is the essence of our faith and testimony. Through this sacrament we as disciples of Jesus proclaim our faith in his sacrifice as well as our hope in the resurrection of the dead. It is a commandment of Christ that we do so and is important. Baptism however is not what saves us. There is no method, sacrament, activity, or formula that you can accomplish that will save you. Baptism is merely one of many things that accompany salvation. Let us look at the details from Scripture.

In approaching the subject of baptism we must discern the differences and meanings of various biblical baptisms. There are three of these.

- 1. John's baptism**
- 2. Jesus' baptism**
- 3. The baptism of fire, or the Holy Spirit.**

Baptism of John

We will start with John's baptism. John, otherwise known as John the Baptist testified:

Matthew 3: 11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12. 12. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John's baptism as the scripture shows was one of repentance. It symbolized the washing away of sins. This baptism was different than that of Christ for it was an outward cleansing according to law. These washings were detailed in Leviticus chapters 12-15. They made people only ceremonially clean according to the ordinances of the Law of Moses.

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Leviticus 14:7 And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

8. And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days.

9. 9. But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean.

Review Questions

1. What are the three biblical baptisms?
2. Where did John get the baptism he practiced?
3. What was the Baptism of John for? Discuss this with the class.
4. What is a sacrament?
5. Who was John's Baptism for

14. Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This is the truth about baptism from the scriptures. It is right to be immersed in water in the name of Jesus before men, but that would be useless if it were not true in your heart first.

Matthew 10:32. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

Review Questions

1. What did John mean by the term "baptism of fire"?
2. Can water baptism save you?
3. Did God send Paul to Baptize? Discuss this with the class
4. Where does the true Baptism take place?
5. How was the thief on the cross saved?

48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

The power was in the message. It was done in their hearts first. Then Peter said:

47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

This is the Baptism that saves. It is when God sends his Spirit to you after you have believed. He gives you this Spirit as a seal of your faith in Christ and the hope of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 12: 13. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Ephesians 1: 13. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Baptism of Christ

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The above is one example of the various washings the Law required to make one “clean”. These spoke of a washing and repentance of sin. Jesus’ baptism is different. Notice how the Apostle Peter describes it:

1 Peter 1:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit:

19. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

20. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

21. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

22. Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

Peter tells us that the baptism of Jesus is not the removing of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clean conscience (spirit) before God. It is about going down into death with Jesus and coming up alive with him to live a new life.

Romans 6: 3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up 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 planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

This is too a baptism of repentance but a deeper and more true repentance of the heart. It is not just a repentance of the flesh which is temporary but also a repentance of the former life we lived in

39. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Matthew 3: 11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

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Notice John referred to the baptism of Jesus as one of fire and the Holy Spirit. He did not mention two water baptisms any more than Jesus told Nicodemus of two physical births. Both spoke of a physical one and a spiritual one. There is one baptism in Christ, and it is the Spirit who performs it. He comes and cleanses our hearts and then indwells them. This is the true baptism of which the water is only a figure. This is why Peter did what he did at Cornelius' house: He saw the proof that they had received in the heart the truth and so had them water baptized.

Acts 10:

38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

sin once and forever. We through faith go down into the deep of death with Jesus as Peter speaks of him by the Spirit going down into death. And then both spirit and body rise together in a newness of life. This is a testimony before God and men that now we through faith have died with Christ and our hope is to be resurrected with him. It is the sign of Jonah Jesus spoke of to the Pharisees.

Matthew 12: 38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

40. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

As Jonah was in the belly of a whale or big fish for three days after he was cast into the deep, So Jesus was cast into the figurative deep of death. As Jonah was spit up alive on dry land so Jesus ascended back from death. We picture this in our baptism by being immersed into the water which is figurative of death and then we are lifted up as Jesus was resurrected. In this way we identify with Jesus and confess he paid for our sins. We are not just

cleansed on the outside as in John's Baptism but his death and therefore his blood cleanses our insides our consciences.

Hebrews 9: 11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

15. And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

God hits in our hearts first always. It can be demonstrated or manifested or testified to through the outside but is first a matter of the Spirit. What you do demonstrates who you are. Look at what the Apostle Paul had to say concerning baptism and salvation as far as the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1: 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;

15. Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

16. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

17. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

The power of God was in the message. The Gospel message we receive in our hearts. That is where the true baptism takes place. When Jesus comes into our hearts he cleanses them. It is the baptism of fire. It is the baptism of Christ. The one portrayed in water is only a picture of the true spiritual one.

Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Spirit

Christians need to understand that it is not the outward baptism that saves them but the inward one. Let us look at the famous verse concerning the thief on the cross.

Luke 23: 39. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

40. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

41. And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

42. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

43. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

It is easy to see here that salvation was not based on being dunked under the water. It was and is a matter of faith first and foremost. The power of

You see what we do as a picture or a testimony through baptism speaks of what already has occurred in our consciences when we receive Jesus as our savior. His blood cleanses our inner man the power of his death on our account. It is not just about the redemption of our body but the redemption of our spirits and even our entire soul.

Hebrews 10

1. For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

5. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

So when we are water baptized into Christ Jesus it is a figure for what has already occurred in our hearts. It is a testimony that now we belong to him who purchased us with his blood. We tell the world of our faith in his sacrifice, our hope in his resurrection, and our acknowledgment of him as our savior and God as our father. It is the testimony of our adoption as his children through Christ Jesus. Whatever is demonstrated in the physical must be first true in the spiritual. Whatever is righteous in our actions or deeds must be first righteous in our hearts. Faith is demonstrated in its works.

Colossians 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

13. 13. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which

was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

Review Questions

1. What does it mean to be baptized into Christ?
2. Where did Jesus go by the Spirit when he died?
3. What is the difference between John and Jesus' baptism? Discuss this with the class
4. What cleanses our consciences?
5. What does Jesus mean by the "sign of Jonah"?