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Baptism: Sharing in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus

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Baptism is the means whereby God allows us to share in the Death, the Burial, and the Resurrection of Jesus. **The previous chapter on baptism developed the concept that baptism is from heaven, not from men and women.** To bolster the importance of baptism in the Christian community, we cited Matthew 28:18-20 to establish the binding validity of baptism upon all those who respond to God's way of salvation through Jesus as God's Anointed One for the redemption of lost humanity. Next, we analyzed cases of conversions from the Book of Acts to see how the Apostles and evangelists understood the command of baptism in one's response to the Good News about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. This chapter (2) seeks to develop the implications of baptism in the life of the believer.

The ministry of the Christian community is to preach the Gospel. This particular ministry of outreach is accomplished through preaching God's way of redemption, and, at this time, instructing those who accept the message of grace concerning baptism. **When the Word of God is preached, the Gospel is presented. Even the Lord's Supper plays an important role in the life of all believers. When the Lord's Supper is distributed, the Gospel is being presented. When baptism is practiced, the Gospel is being presented.** Why are these two ordinances needed within the company of the Resurrection? Is not the written Word of God sufficient? These are questions that we, as Christians, need to reflect upon in order to appreciate what God has accomplished for us in His Divine wisdom.

As a young preacher boy, I used to quote, "I had rather get my sermon by what you do, rather than by what you say." This principle is still applicable today. **We are a people who need to be reminded constantly of what God has accomplished for us in His love, mercy, and goodness.** If a thing is merely told to me, it is all too easy for it to remain on the abstract and invisible plane. It is altogether different when, at the same time it is being told to me, the Gospel is brought to my attention through deeds, that is, through water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Actions affect and operate in a distinct way. **It makes that which is told tangible and concrete in a manner that the mere word could never do.**

THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the observance of the Lord's Supper, it is God who, in Christ, stoops down to us to remind us of the vicarious sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ for the redemption of humanity and of the coming of the new heavens and the new earth, that is to say, the kingdom of God in all its fullness. The Lord's Supper provides an opportunity for Christians to reflect upon the story of salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus. In the observance of the Lord's Supper, it is good for Christians to remember that this message of redemption is not mere word and proclamation, but reality and deed. In fact, Paul discloses the revelation that he received from the Lord concerning the memorial meal:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Just as the Jews, in their observance of the Passover, told the story of redemption from Egypt, so the Christian, too, tells the story of redemption from the world of darkness. Paul states emphatically that in this feast of commemoration, Christians "proclaim the death of the Master until He comes" in judgment against Judah in AD 70 (11:26). The early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper with the view that Christ would come in judgment against apostate Israel, which is what Matthew 24 and 25 describe, which conflict lasted for forty-two months (February AD 67 to August AD 70). Today, this Supper is not only a reminder of God's scheme of redemption through Christ's death upon the Cross, but also a constant reminder of God's New Heaven and Earth (God's new community of the restoration/resurrection of His people—I Corinthians 15; Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 6:2, 13:14; Daniel 12:2) and the passing away of the Old Heaven and Earth (Judaism—see Hebrews 8:13; 12:22-29; Revelation 21:1-4).

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

In water baptism, every Christian encounters the Gospel in concrete deed. Also, in baptism, we are able to experience the Death, the Burial, and the Resurrection of Jesus our Lord. Paul develops this concept in his Epistle to the Christians at Colosse. In this Epistle, he stresses baptism as a burial and resurrection that the Colossians experienced through "faith in the power of God":

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature,^a not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² **having been buried with him**

^a Or *the flesh*

in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)

This same view of water baptism is presented in Paul's Epistle to the Church at Rome. In Romans 6, Paul calls attention to right behavior based upon their new relationship with God through Christ. In developing the standard for ethical behavior, he discusses the implications involved in Christian baptism.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were **baptized into his death**? ⁴ We were therefore **buried with him through baptism** into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,^a that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:1-7)

In water baptism God deals with us personally. Baptism is symbolic of God's scheme of redemption "in" and "through" Jesus. He takes us from the power of darkness and sets us as believers into the kingdom of His Son, which kingdom Daniel (605 BC) foretold (see Daniel 2 and 7). Through natural birth, we belong to a race that is subjected to sin and death, but through our spiritual birth, we belong to the new humanity (see John 1:10-14). Jesus, in His conversation with Nicodemus, speaks of the new birth that is required for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. He declares with penetrating words to Nicodemus concerning the new birth:

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^b gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You^c must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (John 3:5-8)

Did Jesus refer to water baptism that was prevalent in John's baptism? In Chapter 1 of this study, John, one of the Twelve, writes about Jesus' baptism in water and the descending of the Spirit upon Him. Also, in Chapter 3, John writes:

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. ²³ Now **John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water**, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (John 3:22-23)

^a Or *be rendered powerless*

^b Or *but spirit*

^c The Greek is plural.

Does John 3:3-5 refer to Christian baptism? We cannot state positively that Jesus' comments refer to something that did not yet exist (See Ezekiel 36:24-27). Yet, this Scripture citation from Ezekiel does **not** nullify Christian baptism. Whatever Jesus had in mind, we certainly cannot dismiss the role of the Holy Spirit as the instrument by which the new birth comes about (1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 10:34-48). Nevertheless, we cannot help but wonder about Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus and His comments sandwiched between two statements about water baptism.

As cited above (Romans 6:1-7), Paul draws this concept of the new birth in concrete words in his description of Christian baptism. **Through water baptism, we are placed in an entirely new context.** We are now members in the new humanity whose head is Christ and, as a result of this new birth by the Spirit, we now participate in God's righteousness and in the life of the new aeon, that is to say, eternal life. It is, no doubt, for this reason that baptism is called "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Listen carefully to the words of Paul to Titus:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

Fifty days after the Resurrection, Peter stood before a large multitude and proclaimed Jesus as God's Anointed One for the redemption of all who would put their trust in Him (Acts 2). After proclaiming the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, they were so cut to the heart for having crucified the Messiah that they responded by asking: "Brothers, what shall we do?" (2:37). Peter responded by saying: "**Repent and be baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38).

Peter combines "water" ("be baptized") and "Spirit." In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, He combines "water" and "Spirit." Paul also combines "water" and "Spirit" in his Epistle to Titus. Peter's response to the crowd undoubtedly refers to "water" baptism in Acts 2:38. Luke says that "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (2:41). It is very similar in nature to the conversion of Cornelius and his household in which Peter says: "Can anyone keep these people from being **baptized with water**? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (10:47-48). How did the repentant Jews understand the command in Acts 2:38?

It is natural to assume that the baptism that Peter speaks about is water baptism. Luke, more than any other writer of the New Testament, records numerous conversions. One such conversion had to do with the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. From the narrative of this conversion, Luke mentions water in conjunction with the Eunuch's baptism. Luke says that

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they **came to some water** and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. **Why shouldn’t I be baptized?**”^c³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then **both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water** and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (8:34-39)

“Both Philip and the eunuch went **down into the water**” and they both “came up **out of the water**,” according to Luke’s report. As mentioned above, the conversion of Cornelius and his household involved baptism in water (Acts 10:46-48). In reflecting upon John’s baptism, we know that his baptism was also a baptism in water (Matthew 3:1-12). During one occasion of John’s baptism, Matthew reports that Jesus came to be baptized by John. In Matthew’s narrative, he informs his readers that “as soon as Jesus was baptized, he **went up out of the water**” (3:16). Jesus begins his ministry with water baptism and concludes his ministry with the admonition to “go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them**” (28:19). According to Luke’s treatise (Book of Acts) of the early beginnings of the church to Theophilus, the disciples understood this command of baptism to involve water baptism. Since John the Baptizer baptized Jesus, it is appropriate to cite the Apostle John’s remarks about John’s baptizing near Salim.

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.²³ Now John also was **baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water**, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (John 3:22-23)

From the context of these various Scriptures, it appears that it is through baptism that we **enter visibly** into this new existence that God gives through Christ. **It is through water baptism that we enter into the visible community of the redeemed.** Through the natural birth process, we are born to a life that bears the mark of death. On the other hand, through baptism, that is to say, the “washing of rebirth” we share in the new life—a spiritual life that is “in Christ.” **Water Baptism, so it seems, is the act of initiation, or symbolic sign, into the Christian life of a new creation** (see Romans 4:1-25). Through baptism, we are, in some sense, implanted into a fellowship of life with Christ through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

Paul expresses the role of the Holy Spirit this way: “For we were all **baptized by one Spirit** into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ezekiel 36:24-27; 11:19). Again, we cannot help but reflect upon the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Whatever is involved in John 3:5 cannot negate the command of Jesus in His Great Commission. Jesus commanded water baptism in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). If we wish to see how the early Christians understood this

^c Some late manuscripts *baptized?*” Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

command, then, as stated above, all we have to do is read the various accounts of the many recorded conversions in the Book of Acts.

In baptism, the real incorporation “into Christ” takes place, that is to say, “into his death” (Romans 6:3) and resurrection (6:4). **Yes, baptism not only represents His Death but also it represents His Resurrection for the believer.** Paul expresses it this way: “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (6:5). The purpose of all this is that we might live a new life by sharing in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. It is in this vein that Paul says: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (6:4). Since the believer is in a new context, then, we can say with Paul:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!^a (Galatians 2:20-21)

We are members in Christ’s body. Since that which happened to Him who is the head and first born, then, this has also happened to us. In other words, we, too, have experienced death, burial, and resurrection. There appears to be a correspondence between Jesus’ baptism and our baptism. Matthew records the baptism of Jesus as He begins His ministry (Matthew 3:13-17). **For Jesus, water baptism was the act of initiation to His messianic work.** Baptism showed Him, as it were, the way He must go, that is, it was the way of Suffering, Death, and Resurrection. Shortly before His Crucifixion, Jesus predicted His Death. Matthew records a conversation that He had with His disciples.

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them,¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.²¹ “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”²² “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered.²³ Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” (Matthew 20:17-23)

His baptism was a baptism unto death. In conformity with this, Jesus speaks again and again of His Suffering and Death as a baptism that He had to undergo. For instance, Jesus says, “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!” (Luke 12:50). Again, on another occasion, Jesus asked James and John: “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38). Christ’s Death upon the Cross was that baptism which He underwent once for all, when He as Messiah, the Suffering Servant,

^a Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 14.

took our place. **In the same way, our baptism is the act of initiation through which we are brought into the messianic people. Our water baptism embraces our entire Christian life from beginning to end.**

May God help each of us to remember that Christian baptism is not only a baptism unto death, but it is also a baptism unto resurrection. Paul calls attention to the new life that Christians now share with Christ. Following his remarks about baptism, he writes:

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:9-14)

These believers turned their lives around in order to glorify God. Paul says, “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). The Christian “teaching” is not only the proclamation about God’s action in Christ, it is also the pattern or type of life that is in keeping with the teachings of Jesus about holiness. In other words, this teaching reflects the life of the Christian as it is to be shaped in Jesus. It is the same thought that Paul speaks of in Romans 12:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual^a act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

CONCLUSION

From the time of his or her water baptism until death, the baptized person is to live his or her life “in Christ” (Colossians 3:1-17). We need to reflect upon the baptism of Jesus as well as our own baptism. **Jesus, by submitting to baptism, acknowledged God’s claim on Him. We, too, acknowledge God’s claim on us through baptism.** For the believer, baptism calls forth a total consecration of life and holiness of character. **Christian baptism is recognizable as being a sign of the coming of God into a person’s life.** Christian baptism is hope in action. **Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and the door of grace.** Yes, in some sense, God’s grace is appropriated through the medium of the visible sign of baptism. Through baptism into His name, we are publicly set in Christ’s fellowship. Through baptism, we, through God’s grace, are allowed to share in the Death, the Burial, and the Resurrection of Jesus our Lord. In baptism, we die to sin and rise to walk in a new life. In baptism, we are clothed with Christ.

^a Or *reasonable*

Have we clothed ourselves with Christ? Are we children of God? Paul, to the churches of the province of Galatia, writes about faith and baptism. He pens the following sober words:

You are all **sons of God through faith** in Christ Jesus,²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

We become children of God through faith (Galatians 3:26). Yet, we do not discount water baptism in God's scheme of redemption (3:27). Again, Paul writes to the Christians in the province of Galatia that we are "**justified by faith**" (2:15-16). To the Romans, he writes: "We have been **justified through faith**" (Romans 5:1). Once more, Paul pens penetrating words about justification: "The **promise comes by faith**, so that it may be by grace" (4:16). Baptism signifies our clothing ourselves with Christ. **Since baptism is from heaven and not from men, how can we reject baptism commanded by our Lord Jesus and expect to be saved.**

Since we are children of Abraham, **we, too, are justified in the same way Abraham was justified.** Circumcision was not the means of justification for Abraham. Circumcision was a "seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (4:11). Abraham (2166-1991 BC) was justified when he was seventy-five years old (2091 BC) and circumcised when he was ninety-nine years old (2067 BC). He received circumcision twenty-four years later as a sign, or seal, of his justification by faith.¹ **It seems to me that baptism falls within the same category. Baptism is a sign, or seal, of that which has already taken place through faith.** Pay attention to Paul as he writes about two thousand years after the death of Abraham:

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."^a ⁷Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham:** "All nations will be blessed through you."^b ⁹So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6-9)

Justification begins with faith and ends with faith (Romans 1:16-17). Justification by faith does not do away with water baptism. If we reject Christian baptism, we reject God's counsel. Baptism is from heaven, not from men. Even though we do not understand the full implications involved in water baptism, nevertheless, we submit to baptism as a command of our Lord Messiah. We are blessed in that God devised a way that we can share in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. **Baptism cannot be separated from faith in Christ.** I accept

¹My point of argument concerning the time difference between Abraham's justification and circumcision is to illustrate his time of justification. Even though he was justified by faith, he did not receive the command for circumcision until twenty-four years later. On the other hand, baptism is commanded upon the point of one's acceptance of Jesus as Lord in one's life. This no doubt is the reason that baptism was never postponed following one's faith in the Messiah.

^a Gen. 15:6

^b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

the words of Jesus as recorded in Mark: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). Whatever beliefs we have about baptism, we need to do what Jesus commanded.²

²For a more detailed study of baptism, see Dallas Burdette, “Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longview, FL: Xulon, 2008), 196-233.