

BAPTISM: ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

—Matthew 28:19.

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

—Mark 16:15, 16.

In these two texts we have the importance of baptism sufficiently set forth. Let us learn from the Scriptures what it signifies, and in so doing we shall show its nature and the necessity for it.

That baptism does not consist merely in an outward form is indicated in 1 Cor. 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.” It is true here as elsewhere that “the body is of Christ;” and that this is the body into which we are baptized, is positively stated in Gal. 3:27, where we read, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Thus we are taught that baptism is that by which we become Christ’s, and heirs according to the promise. It is that by which we get into Christ, who is the Door of salvation. Being baptized into his body is being joined to His church, for the church is the body of Christ. See Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18. And since it is by his Spirit that this union is effected, it is evident that baptism is something more than a mere form, and that only those are members of the true church of Christ who have the Spirit of Christ. See Rom. 8:9. This must not by any means be understood as depreciating literal baptism or union with the visible church. We only wish to emphasize the fact that the simple form is not all.

Since it is by baptism that we become united to Christ,—”put on Christ,”—a very important question is, At what point do we come into contact with Christ? That is, At what stage in the ministry of Christ do we become united to Him? The answer to this gives the key to the entire subject of baptism. This question is answered in Rom. 6:3, 4, as follows:—

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? 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.”

The death of Christ, then, is that by which we become united to Him. It is, so to speak, the marriage ceremony, by

which we declare our union with Christ. Paul says, “I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” 2 Cor. 11:2. Just as in ordinary marriage two persons are united, so that they are no longer two, but “one flesh,” so in putting on Christ we become one with Him. Paul, after declaring that a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh, adds, This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” Eph. 5:32. But in this union with Christ it is His personality that dominates; we yield ourselves to Him—become swallowed up in Him—so that the one person is not us but Christ.

Baptism signifies the death and resurrection of Christ; but it signifies more than a simple recognition of that fact; it signifies our acceptance of that sacrifice, and that we actually share His death and resurrection. If we ever are glorified with Christ, we must suffer with Him. Rom. 8:17. We must share the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death, and must also know the power of His resurrection. Phil. 3:10. Let us trace the course of this great transaction.

“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Rom. 3:23. Because all have sinned, judgment has come upon all men to condemnation. This condemnation is to death, for the wages of sin is death. See Rom. 5:12, 18; 6:23. Every man that does not believe in Christ is condemned already. John 3:18. Sentence of death has already gone forth upon us, and our life is forfeited. In yielding to Satan, we have sold ourselves to him, and have received nothing in exchange. The Scripture says, “Ye have sold yourselves for naught.” Isa. 52:3. Therefore we really have no life. This life that men live does not belong to them; they have given it, with themselves, into the power of Satan. And because sinners are condemned to death,—have forfeited their life,—the Scripture says that “he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.” John 3:36. He never has any life of his own.

But the same Scripture that says, “Ye have sold yourselves for naught,” says also, “Ye shall be redeemed without money.” Christ is the Redeemer. And because “the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.” Heb. 2:14, 15. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to give life to those who had forfeited their life to Satan. He, the stronger than the strong, came and entered into the prison-house of Satan, that he might redeem his captives.

“Ye shall be redeemed without money.” “Knowing that ye were redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blem-

ish and without spot, even the blood of Christ.” 1 Peter 1:18, 19, Revised Version. Money could not purchase a single life. Life must be given for life; and the only life that could redeem a forfeited life is the life of Christ. He could buy us back only by giving his life for ours. That means that he gave his life to us, if we accept him. He has life in himself. He could lay down his life and take it again. When he lay in the grave, “it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Acts 2:24. Herein he differed from man. If man should give up his life in payment of the forfeit, he would have nothing left. But Christ, whose life is of greater worth than that of all created beings, can give up his life and still have as much life left. Having paid the forfeit, he can give life to us in place of ours. If we accept his life, we are sure of life, no matter what becomes of this life.

But in order to get his life, which is proof against the power of Satan, we must acknowledge that our life is lost, and that there is no righteousness in us, with which to give anything toward its redemption. Knowing that this life is not ours anyway, we must be willing to surrender it into the hands of Christ, in order that we may receive his life in exchange. This is most reasonable. It is a question of whether we will give our life to Satan, and get nothing in exchange, or to Christ, and get his life instead. It would seem as though everybody ought to decide without a moment’s hesitation; yet it is a struggle for everyone to give up this forfeited life for Christ’s. It is not pleasant to die, and they would fain put it off as long as possible, or even persuade themselves that they will not have to give up life at all. The reason for this is that giving up this life means giving up all that pertains to it. All that is of self must go with the life. Says the apostle Paul: “They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.” Gal. 5:24, Revised Version.

This giving up of our life in order to get Christ’s life instead, is variously spoken of as yielding ourselves to become his servants, submitting ourselves to God, etc. The question arises, How do we submit ourselves to God? It is simple. Look at your life: see what things pertain solely to the present, natural life, those things that you do by nature. Take a survey of the things that you are addicted to, which you know are not Christ-like, but which cause you condemnation, even by your own heart. Now you have doubtless done this; you have also repeatedly tried to overcome them and put them away, but have not been able to do so. But you sincerely desire to be rid of them.

You would rather have Christ than your own ways. Therefore you say, “Here, Lord, take me as I am; I give myself into Thy hands, for Thee to do with me as Thou wilt; take all these evils from me by the power that rests in Thee alone.

“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

“Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,

To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

So at last the surrender is made. We give ourselves to the Lord, and take him instead. How do we get him? We cannot tell anything about the process; we only know that it is by faith. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:26. Christ dwells in the heart by faith. See Eph. 3:17. All that there is to do on our part is to give up, to yield ourselves fully to the Lord, desiring that his ways shall take the place of our ways, and believing that he will give himself to us, according to his promise. Then we are buried with him by baptism into his death, thus signifying the putting off of the old life, the crucifying of the old man, and the taking of Christ’s life, in whom we rise to walk in newness of life.

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Col. 3:1-3.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”
—1 Cor. 15:10.

“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.” —Rom. 6:6.

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”
—Eph. 4:22-24.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God.”
—2 Cor. 5:17, 18.

Do not these Scriptures state as plainly as can be that in becoming Christ’s we take his life in exchange for ours? It is not simply that Christ gave his life to purchase us, but that he gives his life to us; our life has been forfeited, and we are virtually dead,—dead in trespasses and sins, and he gives his life to us that we may actually have life. Henceforth, then, it is to be the life of Christ that meets the temptations of Satan, and labors to do the Father’s will. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; therefore the life which is given to us will present the same characteristics that the life of Christ presented when he was on the earth in person; his life in us must be as strong to do and to resist as it was when he lived in Judea.

How can we live this life? Just as we received it, by faith. Read carefully and remember the following texts:—

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” Col. 3:1.

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Rom. 6:8-11.

“I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Gal. 2:20.

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 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.” Col. 2:9-12.

This is the order of the new life: Having accepted Christ’s life, we remember that the future life is to be his, not ours. Then the same spirit of self-renunciation that led us to accept Christ must be ever present with us to lead us to hold him. We must pray not only for a clean heart to be created in us, but also for a steadfast spirit to be renewed within us. And how do we hold him?—Just the same as we accepted him and were raised with him; through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. That is, with an intense longing that his life shall be manifest in ours, we lay hold of it through our faith in the power that raised Christ from the dead. We know that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead can quicken us, for that is why Christ was raised from the dead. He “was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.

This is that which Paul means when he expresses the desire, “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.” Phil. 3:10. It is what he wishes for us when he prays, “that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.” Eph. 1:18-20.

There can be no greater exhibition of power than that which is required to raise the dead. It is creative power. And this is the power which is given to us in Christ, the acceptance of which we acknowledge when we are buried with him by baptism into his death, and are raised in him. How true it is that “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” 2 Peter 1:3. And it is the manifestation of the power of Christ’s life in our lives that gives us a sure hope of eternal life with him. For says the apostle:—

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”—1 Peter 1:3-5.

Is it necessary to devote any space to the discussion of the subjects and the “mode of baptism”? The statement is that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Those only who *believe*, therefore, are proper subjects for baptism. This does not by any means imply that only grown persons may be baptized, for very young children may have sincere and intelligent faith in Christ. The gray-haired man must believe as a little child. But however old or however young, belief is the prerequisite of baptism.

As to the “mode,” we see no need for any such discussion. Baptism is a burial. It is an expressive symbol of the complete hiding of self in Christ. It is an expressive symbol of the complete hiding of self in Christ. The expression is, “buried with Him by baptism into death.” This would mean nothing if sprinkling were baptism. When baptism is declared to be a burial, that is really all that need be said about it. That word describes it exactly, but it does not in any sense describe sprinkling. But there is certainly no need of discussing the “mode” of baptism with one who is not a fit subject for the ordinance; what he wants is to be shown his need of Christ; and when one has come to the point where he is wholly submissive to the will of Christ, when he fully surrenders to him, then there is no necessity for any such discussion. He will gladly accept Christ in the divinely-appointed way. May God grant that all who read may know, not simply the fact, but the power of Christ’s resurrection.

“Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”