

BAPTISM

Services during the era of the Old Testament symbolized those during the time of the New Testament. The former emphasized the importance of rules and ceremony routines, but the latter one emphasizes the spiritual reality and life. However, two things have been specifically commanded by the Lord to do in the time of New Testament. They are baptism and breaking of the bread. These two things are concerning directly the truth of God's salvation. The breaking of the bread is regarding the Son of God and His body. Baptism speaks directly of the redemption of the Son of God. Therefore, both of them are very important. In this issue, we will study the truth concerning baptism:

I. The Importance of Baptism

1. The Lord's commandment prior to His ascension

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, *Matthew 28:18-19*

This was the Lord's very last commandment immediately before His departure for heaven. It was a very serious commandment for it was founded on the truth that all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. Therefore, we not only need to make disciples of all the nations, but also baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. The commandment of "one baptism"

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, *Ephesians 4:5*

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:5

God's unique and only saving way is through the redemption upon Calvary. Saints through all generations and all places partake together in that one-time redemption. By baptism, we express our partaking in His death, kingdom and body.

II. Things Accomplished by Baptism

1. Saved through baptism

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus [as] Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Romans 10:9-10

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. *Mark 16:16*

As long as we believe in our heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead and confess with our mouth that He is the Lord, we are being saved in God's sight. The verse "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" means to be saved in the sight of men. Baptism is like a testimony held among men, to witness that we have departed from the curse in Adam and entered into Christ and His kingdom.

2. Baptism brings in the forgiveness of sins

And Peter [said] to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' *Acts 22:16*

By the blood of Jesus Christ and through our faith, our sins are forgiven in the sight of God. Acts chapter 2 indicates that hearts of many were pierced by Peter's preaching that day, and they asked him what they should do to be saved. Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the forgiveness of sins is completed through baptism after true repentance. Baptism is like a proclamation that one has come out of the world and departed from previous sinful deeds against God. Saul (later Paul) met with the Lord on his way to Damascus. Ananias told him to be baptized and wash away his sins so that others could see the one that persecuted the Lord and His followers had turned to Him and become a Christian.

III. The Meaning of Baptism

1. Three things symbolize "baptism" in Old Testament

A. Flood symbolizes the death of Christ that has buried all old creation

who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through [the] water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, *1 Peter 3:20-21*

During the time of Noah, all were killed by the flood except Noah's family of eight who were saved by the ark. Hiding in the ark, they escaped from God's wrath and judgment. In the ark and through the water, they were able to be separated from that wicked generation. The death of Christ encompasses all old creation. By baptism into Christ and His resurrection, we become redeemed new creation.

B. Red Sea symbolizes the death of Christ that has overcome all the power of enemies

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2

The cloud and sea that Israelites passed under and through represent our baptism in the Holy Spirit and water. Passing through Red Sea delivered them from the control of Pharaoh and sided with Moses. That experience means that through baptism, we are delivered from the hand of enemies and now belong to Christ. When Pharaoh and his soldiers chased to the edge of water, Moses told Israelites: "...the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever." Therefore, baptism means the death of Christ overcomes all the enemies and their power.

C. Jordan River symbolizes the death of Christ has done away with our natural self life

When sons of Israel passed through the Jordan in order to enter into the promise land, the waters of the Jordan flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap at Adam. Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing. He also had Israelites take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan and carry them to the lodging place, and put them down there. That act means the exchange of life, and that through the death (the Jordan) of Christ all natural lives have been buried. Therefore only the people of resurrection can enter into the promise land to enjoy the abundant blessings in Christ.

2. The mystery of baptizing into Christ's death

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with [Him] in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also [in the likeness] of His resurrection, Romans 6:3-5

Baptizing into Christ means to baptize into His death. For His death has triumphed over all enemies. His death has swallowed death, and buried the entire old creation. His death was all inclusive, encompassing all of us. When He died, we died in Him. This is a great mystery. Through baptism, we acknowledged the truth that we died with Him and were buried with Him.

3. Buried with Him and raised up with Him

having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. Col 2:12

We have been buried with Him in baptism, and we have also been raised up with Him. When we become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. The power raised the Lord from the dead also works in us to raise us up to become a new creation. Therefore, we are entitled to the life of Christ and His abidance in resurrection.

4. Clothe ourselves with Christ

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Galatians 3:26-27

Baptism is to clothe Christ. We all wear Christ who is our garment of righteousness. In Him, we are accepted by God. Christ becomes our new life.

5. Receive a good conscience

And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 3:21

By baptism we are in Christ and proclaim that we have died, been buried and raised up with Him. By baptism we testify that Christ has redeemed us through His death, justified us through His resurrection, and removed dirt from our conscience. We can now witness to the world, angels, devil that we are united with Christ and have the full salvation in Him.

VI The Baptism

1. The Lord's example of baptism

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan [coming] to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit [it] at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, [and] coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Matthew 3:13-17

The baptism John gave was for repentance. When John saw Jesus coming to the Jordan, he proclaimed: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Through baptism, Jesus openly indicated His absolute obedience that a sinless man like Him was willing to stand in the position of sinners. Therefore, after being baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Him.

God spoke from heavens: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." So, in Him we receive the Holy Spirit and are blessed.

2. The condition of baptism - To believe

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. Mark 16:16

[And 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.]" Acts 8:37

Who is qualified to be baptized? Only those who believe in the Lord. As the Lord said above that "believed and ...baptized". The word "believe" has to be a true faith in the fact that Jesus is the Son of God whom God has raised from the dead. Philip said: "...believe with all your heart". That means a person has to completely believe without a doubt before he can be baptized. Believing is the only and absolutely necessary condition of baptism.

3. The timing of baptism

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2:41

And he took them that [very] hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his [household.] Acts 16:33

Believing and baptism are the two sides of a coin. Once we are certain of our belief in Christ, we should be baptized as soon as possible.

4. The place of baptism

And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; Acts 8:36-39

"Baptism" means to "immerse into water". Bible says that after the Lord was baptized, He "came up from the water". Therefore, he had to go down to the Jordan first and then came back up later. Philip did the same thing when baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch. They both went down to the water and came up from the water.

5. It takes our life time to experience the reality of the meaning of baptism

The procedure of baptism may only take a few minutes, yet it takes our life time to experience its spiritual reality. Many times in our life, we have to stand on the foundation of baptism and proclaim "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me." We make that proclamation so that Christ can be seen on us in our daily life and God can be glorified.

By Timothy Liang