

## Baptism—It's Significance

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (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 we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been 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 were 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:—

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3, 4).

The death of Christ, then, is that by which we become united to him. 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.

“For all have sinned and fall 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). A 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, “You have sold yourselves for nothing” (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 who does not believe the Son shall not see life” (John 3:36). He never has any life of his own.

But the same scripture that says, “You have sold yourselves for nothing,” says also, “And you shall be redeemed without money.” Christ is the Redeemer and because “the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime 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.

“And you shall be redeemed without money.” “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18, 19). 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 held by 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: "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24).

But 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. "For you are all sons of God through 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 then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward 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 was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of 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, today, 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 then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1).

“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:8–11).

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who 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 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 up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

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 you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of

His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked 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 has given to us all things that pertain to 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, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3–5).

We have not devoted any space to the discussion of “the mode of baptism.” 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. May God grant that all who read may know, not simply the fact, but the power of Christ’s resurrection.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24, 25).

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