

Hartford Bible Students

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Baptism: Truth vs. Tradition

Shortly after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, he told his disciples: "I have a baptism to be baptized with..." (Luke 12:50). Jesus was not referring to his water baptism by John but to his mission which would consume him daily for three and a half years. This baptism was a sacrificial journey which would end with his death upon the cross, when he cried — "It is finished!"

Christians are in agreement that the New Testament teaches baptism for Jesus' followers. And while united in this fact, there is significant diversity of thought respecting its method and meaning. Now in this time of the end, Christians are enabled through Bible study tools to learn the truth on this beautiful but often misunderstood picture of true Christian baptism.

Baptism into Christ's Death

"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ...if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."
(Romans 6:3-5)

This baptism into death begins at the moment of our full surrender to the will of God — consecrating our all to follow and obey Him, even unto death. (Revelation 2:10) The point at which God accepts our sincere consecration is when we are counted as prospective members of the body of Christ — Jesus being our Head. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22, 23)

Our wills — our minds — control our bodies, brains, time, talents, influence and possessions. There is not a thing of value that we possess which does not properly come under the control of the will. So when we surrender our wills, we give our ALL to God in Christ. Those who make a full consecration of their lives become joint-sacrificers with Jesus in the service of the Truth. This burial or immersion of our human will into the will of Christ means our symbolic death as

human beings. "Ye are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3)

This burial of our wills is then followed by our begetting to newness of life — to a new, spirit nature, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus — with the prospect of a spiritual resurrection. Following in his footsteps, we take up our cross to follow him in the death of self-will and the life of the new mind and will. "...if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him..." (2 Timothy 2:11, 12; Romans 6:3-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Symbolism of Water Baptism

Referring back to Romans 6, notice that there is no mention of immersion into water. Baptism into Christ's death is the real baptism for his faithful followers. Water baptism is only the symbol, as it was to Jesus. All who receive this true baptism in full consecration are to be considered as members of the Church. The beautiful symbol of water baptism is shown by the new believer being immersed under the water, in full submission, as in death. This symbolizes the death to self-will and rising again to newness of life by the grace and strength of our Lord. Our water baptism is the public confession of our heart commitment.

By their own example, Jesus and the Apostles clearly taught symbolic water baptism: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name [by the authority] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19, 20) It was granted to the Apostles and to all faithful teachers to instruct new believers respecting the grace of God in Christ, their justification through faith, and to be dead to self-will. Water baptism — full immersion in water — is symbolic of the burial of the "old man." (Romans 6:6) It is the outward sign by which the inward, heart consecration would be a witness to those observing their baptism.

Formalism Led to Confusion

A few short centuries after the Apostles fell asleep in death, superstitious views respecting the act of baptism were erroneously injected into doctrine. It was no longer a symbol to represent the full submission of one's will to the will of God, but the formal act of baptism was thought to cancel past sins and guarantee entrance to heaven. It was then claimed that if an individual did not perform the act of baptism, their hope of salvation would be lost forever.

Confusion on this subject led believers to seek baptism for their children — trusting in the formal act and not the free will and faith of the believer. Because young children are incapable of sacrifice — heart consecration to the will of God — a further perversion of the intent was fabricated by which “godparents” might become sponsors for children.

Surrendering one's will to God must be a personal choice — something about which billions have never known. It is reassuring to know that Jesus “gave himself a ransom for all [including those who were never baptized] to be testified in due time.” (1 Timothy 2:6) In this due time, all will come forth from their graves to learn of the life Jesus gave for the life of the world. Then all will come to know him, from the least to the greatest! (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 4:10; Jeremiah 31:34)

**“Many are called, but few are chosen.”
Matthew 22:14**

Many hear the call of discipleship and begin to search the Scriptures, but few enter upon this narrow path. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:14) These are now prospective adopted sons of God. These chosen now seek with diligence the will of God in His holy Word. With the guidance of God's spirit through able teachers, these chosen begin to understand the deeper things of God: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and he will shew them His covenant.” (Psalm 25:14; John 16:13)

As the newly consecrated progress, they also gain more insight into the purpose of being baptized into Christ's death: “For it has been granted to you on

behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.” (Philippians 1:29)

Following the steps of Jesus Christ means to walk as he did from his baptism at the Jordan River until he died on the cross at Calvary. This is the baptism to which Jesus now calls us: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

Having consecrated our ALL to God, having shown publicly, by the water symbol, what is in our hearts, we now continue on in fullness of faith and a life of sanctification — separation from worldly influences, the sinful tendencies and the allurements of Satan. Those who remain faithful to their covenant with the Father receive the eternal crown of life. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10)

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