

16.

Holy or All Wet?

(Part 1: Baptism; Part 2: Church; Part 3: Plan of Salvation)

1: Baptism

“A pitcher of water can’t save you!” shouted Dave. Gesturing to other items on the restaurant table, “Neither can salt or pepper; it’s Jesus!”

Christians agree that humanity is universally sinful and must convert. However, many believers insist that water baptism is required for salvation (baptismal regeneration), while others insist that baptismal regeneration is a false doctrine which perverts the Gospel. So you should carefully examine baptism’s significance.

Baptism’s Foreshadowing

Every physical necessity (the type) in the Old Covenant foreshadowed a New Covenant spiritual necessity (the antitype). For example, animal sacrifices typified Christ’s ultimate sacrifice. Type and antitype are especially pronounced in the case of baptism. Under the Old Covenant, the ritual for cleansing anyone considered unclean included washing themselves with water. In Naaman’s case, washing in the Jordan river stood between his having leprosy and being totally cleansed. *Irenaeus’ Fragment 34* (AD 180) states: Naaman, suffering from leprosy, was purified upon being baptized. It is indicative that being lepers in sin, we are made clean by the sacred water.

The Epistle of Barnabas (AD 100) considered the healing waters of Ezekiel chapter 47 prophetic. Barnabas 11:15-16 says: This meaneth that we descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but arise, bearing fruit in our heart. Imaging the Old Covenant laver, *Cyprian’s Treatise VIII* (AD 250) stated “The (New Covenant) laver of saving water extinguishes Gehenna’s fire”.

Baptism’s New Covenant Importance

Jesus’ baptism sanctified water (Luke 3:21-22). *Ignatius to the Ephesians* (AD 105) chapter 18 states, “He was born and baptized, that by His passion He might purify water.” Jesus came by water, which bears witness (I John 5:6-8). Thereafter, being born again involved water. John 3:3 & John 3:7 both proclaim being born again and sandwich John 3:5 between them, establishing their context. Throughout Church history, John 3:5’s water was understood as baptismal water. Tertullian’s *On Baptism 12:1* (AD 200) stated, “No one can attain salvation without Baptism, especially in view of the Lord’s declaration ‘Unless a man is born of water, he shall not have life.’”

From Tertullian’s *On Baptism Chapter 1*: “We, little fishes, after the example of our ΙΧΘΥΣ (ikthus, an acronym spelling fish) Jesus Christ, are born in water.” Unbaptized Christians did not exist. During Philip’s contact with the Ethiopian, both men were far along the road (Acts 8:26-39) Only Philip, already understanding the man’s commitment, witnessed his baptism. Therefore, his baptism was not an outward sign to anyone. Besides, baptism is commanded (Acts 10:48).

From approximately one hundred “New Testament” baptismal references, several different baptisms are mentioned; some are merely figures of speech. However, the Great Commission’s baptism into Christ (Matthew 28:19) is paramount. Specific details of this baptism are that it’s a full body immersion in water (Greek: baptizō, to make whelmed, that is, fully wet per John 3:23. This burial requires much water.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) must also be invoked. It was always accomplished by naming all three, the earliest form being triple immersion. (Jesus only baptism is considered invalid). Baptism was done to remit sins. *Baptism now saves us* (Peter 3:21), washes away sins (Acts 22:16) buries us with Christ, puts us into His death (Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:12) and clothes us with Christ (Galatians 3:27). Besides baptism preceding salvation, continued belief must follow (Mark 16:16). Baptism was also administered by male Christians only (every NT and early Church example).

Sin's terrible plague requires drastic measures (Christ's hospital, the Church, and baptism, cleansing and sin-eradicating medicine) not just acknowledgment of the Great Physician. Let's not oppose the good doctor's prescriptions or methods.

The early Church unequivocally taught that water baptism is necessary for salvation. Some examples are: *Pastor of Hermes 3:8-12 (AD 150)* stated "Your life is saved through water." The early Church read *The Pastor (or Shepherd) of Hermes* alongside canonized scripture. Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 44 (AD 160) stated, "There is no other way to become acquainted with Christ, than being washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah." In *Irenaeus Against Heresies (AD 180)* chapter 1: "Satan has instigated these men (Gnostics) to deny that baptism which is regeneration to God, thus renouncing the whole faith."

Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata Book IV Chapter 25 (AD 195)* states, "He generated us from our mother—the water." Tertullian's *On Baptism Chapter 1 (AD 200)*: "A viper of the Cainite heresy carried away many, making it her aim to destroy baptism. That monstrous creature knew how to kill the little fishes, by taking them from the water!"

Cyprian's 74th Epistle (AD 256) stated, "The second birth, which occurs in baptism, begets sons of God." *Archelaus' Disputation with Manes (AD 300)* chapter 50 states, "Without baptism, neither will there be remission of sins, but every man will die in his own sins." Church leaders in every subsequent century taught baptismal regeneration. To understand the significance of the early fathers, see XIV.Revival!

Infant Baptism

If we can disprove something, that's one thing. But if we cannot and still disapprove, let's simply practice something else. If we object to infant baptism, we can be baptized as adults and encourage others to do likewise, and not cause unnecessary division.

Infant baptism supposedly exists because of the doctrine of Original Sin. However, Eastern Orthodoxy rejects Original Sin while having practiced infant baptism from its beginning. Rather, adult baptism only appears to be Protestant-originated. Reformers' uncompromising belief of individual justification by faith alone to them implied that the gateway into Christianity was restricted to adult believers. Baptism became known as only an outward sign of adult faith. This contrasts with early Christian belief, where baptism was known as the instrument God chose to confer Christ's saving grace to humanity, which included all. Besides, Christendom practiced infant baptism for over a thousand years without any known objections.

Although every baptism mentioned in Scripture involved an adult, this proves nothing. Baptism had to start with adults regardless. Infants would not baptize other infants. Subsequent groups of unbaptized adults would not baptize anyone either. If they believed in the importance of baptism, they would already have been baptized. This Christian mystery is understood as retroactive, implicitly including all (Matthew 19:14, Acts 16:15, 31-33, Galatians 3:27). Baby Moses in the bulrushes hinted at infant baptism.

God's people are likened to virgins betrothed to the bridegroom Jesus Christ, and the original understanding was that God chooses people before they choose Him. Baptism is considered the wedding between a person and Christ, and parents always gave away their daughter to the suitor, there was no dating. Parents giving children to Christ in baptism fits these analogies. And the Church never viewed unbaptized infants as lost, as she recognizes infants as exempt from needing faith and blanketed by God's grace. So again, if you object to this tradition, simply refrain from baptizing your babies, be baptized as an adult, and avoid arguing.

Misunderstandings

Baptism of blood simply means that someone died for their faith. And a baptism of desire is recognized in cases where people lacked the opportunity to get baptized into water; God's grace is bestowed on their intention. These aren't different baptisms; they are extensions of, and mystically one with Baptism into Christ. A long, detailed treatise on re-baptism, including blood and desire baptisms for believers, was written by a 3rd century anonymous writer. (Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 5; pages 667-678)

Though there are more scripture passages on faith than baptism, we have more passages on baptism than the blood of Christ. Yet Christians aren't saved without Christ's blood. Besides, the thief on the cross and sinful woman lived before Christ's New Covenant took effect, and wouldn't have been baptized into Christ's death, since He hadn't died.

Taking certain Scriptures separately, one might conclude that salvation only requires hearing (John 8:47), believing (John 11:25), repenting (Luke 15:7), or confessing (Luke 12:8), depending on which Scripture you focus on. Rather, Scripture uses synecdoche: a part representing a whole. For example, hands are workers, heads are cattle, and the dollar is money's buying power. Even Acts 19:5's reference to being baptized in Jesus' name is a synecdoche for the full triune formula. All these elements are required. "Faith changes the present, repentance changes the future, and baptism changes the past."

Romans 10:10 is commonly misunderstood as teaching salvation upon belief and confession. However, that says UNTO (future tense) salvation. "Restoration" believers understand this, and point to Acts 2:38, proclaiming that baptism completes the process, and imbues one with the Spirit. Yet Acts 2:38 also has the future tense (ye shall). Tertullian's *On Baptism* (AD 200) chapters 6-8 clarifies that Holy Spirit is received by the laying on of hands (what Catholics call Confirmation). Origen confirms this in *De Principiis Book I chapter 3* (AD 225). If baptized and confirmed persons backslide, the method of pardon is confession and repentance or penance since Christ's body has been accessed.

Rebaptism (Acts 19:3-5)

Since true baptism puts one into Christ and remits sins, if I'd only received an outward sign "baptism", I'd get properly baptized immediately. Other churches water down baptism into pouring or dripping. Conscience-wise, I'm appalled. Why would anyone tamper with Jesus' example? I advise one to only administer immersion, and if not immersed already (better yet, triple immersion) request it. Far from baptism by immersion being too much to ask, some persecuted believers in the former Soviet Union went to a river in winter-time and broke the ice so they could baptize converts.

God will judge exactly what is or isn't valid baptism, but I wouldn't be caught dead without the proper form. I must know that I've been buried with Christ. Even those baptized by John's Heaven-appointed baptism got re-baptized. If someone thinks that being dunked in water is too much to ask, why would they sacrifice their lives, which Christ required His followers to do?

Although it's hard to understand how water could save you, maybe Jesus could have saved without a wooden cross either, but that's another chosen instrument (not salt or pepper). Addressing how to be saved, why would Peter give false and unnecessary information? Peter said "Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins", considering people disciples upon their baptism (Acts 2:27-41). Please find a church that teaches and practices this truth. Summarily, baptism is neither a work nor man-made tradition. John the baptizer himself declared, "I need baptism" (Matthew 3:14); how about you? Finally, believing without baptism is considered spiritual fornication. Baptism, a spiritual wedding, makes one a member of the Church, Christ's bride (Ephesians 5:23-32) who waits together for Christ the bridegroom (Matt.25:1-13).

2: The Church

The perennial charge that most churchgoers are hypocrites, which by definition are those who pretend to be what they're not, is judgmental and unprovable. If you mean that they fail to live up to Christ's standards, I fully agree. The Church is a hospital for the sin-sick; aren't we all? Outside the Church is the evil world; there's no good alternative. And the Church is of absolute importance since Christ isn't coming for anyone but Her; He's not an adulterer. Note the following:

The word church/s comes from the Greek ek-klay-see'-ah, meaning the called out and/or called together. Why would Christians be called out of the world's influence (John 17:6) which lies in wickedness (I John 5:19) and unto holiness (Peter 1:15-16) without attempting to fellowship with likeminded people?

The Church is Christ's body (Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:12-16, Ephesians 5:28-30); Christ is her head. Like the delineated human body, one part doesn't walk away and consider the body unessential.

The Church is the sheepfold (Luke 15:4-7, John 10:1-8, John 21:15-17, Peter 2:25) of Christ the Great Shepherd. A sheep wandering off by itself is lost.

JESUS purchased the Church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the Church is worth the blood of Christ.

Sunday (the Lord's Day) assembly is the antitype of the mandatory Old Covenant commandment of reverencing the Sabbath Day.

Christians are repeatedly told to worship and honor the Lord by taking Communion and singing in the New Testament scriptures.

Noah's ark was considered a prefigured Church type throughout Christian history. Everyone outside the ark was utterly lost.

The Church is Christ's people, themselves an interconnected building (Corinthians 3:9, II Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:20-22, Peter 2:4-5) with Christ the most basic and essential bedrock or cornerstone foundation.

The early Church did not recognize any "independent Christians" independent of a Church assembly. Like a football or baseball team, you don't play by yourself. Despite excruciating conflicts, Ty Cobb remained faithful to the Detroit Tigers, establishing himself as an outstanding baseball player. Certainly we should also strive to harmonize with others if possible. But if not possible, so be it. The Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God and the Church are inextricably one. Christ is king of His kingdom and high priest over His church. Everyone baptized into Christ automatically becomes a Church member and the King's subject. Those outside one are outside of both; no exception is found within Scripture or early Church writings. This is consistently confirmed throughout Christian history for two millennia.

An entire gamut of New Testament figures represent the Church, Kingdom, and entire body of believers. This scriptural panorama dramatically demonstrates the great importance of one great entity, the Church/Kingdom.

After the Church's establishment on the Pentecost following Christ's resurrection, the rest of the New Testament scriptures deal with the Church and were written to churchgoers. Christianity was all about the Church.

James 4:4 states: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Therefore, those who seek companionship should prefer the Church (the called out of the world) before anyone else. Besides, people strongly influence each other; your friends could either make or break you. The Christian life is hard enough to live without negative influences, and it's much easier to make that journey with companions who know the way. Also, if baptized persons disassociate themselves from the assembly their separation defeats the purpose of their baptism.

Ordination

Since Christ was the absolute authority, He rightfully delegated authority. After appointing apostles, His apostles appointed their successors (bishops) who appointed their successors in an unbroken line until now. I'm concerned about the nature of many groups, since apostolic succession was an idea started by the Lord Jesus Christ. It therefore behooves us to research how our own church group was founded. Some groups were started by a man who decided that he gained enough knowledge to declare himself an authority. Other groups appoint elders by the laying on of hands, but the question is, were they themselves given the authority to appoint elders? If so, did those who gave them authority themselves have the authority to do so, and so on, all the way back to Christ?

This is like a long electrical cord connected to an outlet (the source). The source of ordination was Jesus Christ. Electrical cords with even a millimeter's break along any part of them would be cut from the source and useless. God could bypass the system if He wanted to, but if He set up a means of power and grace, we should respect that. Unfortunately, society has sometimes become the tail wagging the dog, the clergy succumbing to popular opinion.

Since Church groups which have apostolic succession have been corrupted, millions have disgustingly quit their church or have joined a group of their choice. I empathize completely. Yet where do these present leaders of other churches get their authority? "How can he be esteemed a pastor, who succeeds to no one, but begins from himself? For the true shepherd remains and presides over the Church of God by successive ordination." (From Cyprian's *Epistle LXXIV:25*; AD 250). "We have succeeded them (the Apostles), governing the Lord's Church with the same power" (quoting Clarus of Mascula in the *Seventh Council of Carthage AD 256*).

Christians historically confirm the necessity of submission to Church authority. Saint Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians 5:7 AD 100, said: "Beloved, be careful to be subject to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons. He that is subject to these is obedient to Christ, but he that is disobedient to these is disobedient to Christ."

So may Christian believers consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together; but exhorting one another more as Judgment Day approaches. For if we sin willfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries (Paraphrasing Hebrews 10:24-27).

3: The Plan of Salvation

Here are the non-negotiable requirements for salvation **for those who have had a fair opportunity to both hear and understand Christ's message** {The Christian message is found at the end of chapter 6}: First, nobody can come to Jesus unless God the Father draws them (John 6:44). God's Holy Spirit then continues to work in the person's life. Here is the person's part:

A) Straight line steps (Not necessarily in order):

- *Initial belief in Jesus as God incarnate, His conquering death via resurrection, and His perfect teachings.
- *Learning the Christian requirements via a reliable translation of New Testament Scripture (like the KJV).
- *Initial repentance: assenting to turn away your sinful self from off the throne and enthrone Christ instead.
- *Verbally confessing Christ.
- *Baptism into Christ (water immersion in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and His Church body.

B) Continuous Christian life cycle:

- *Regular Church attendance and active participation
- *Regularly feeding on godly instruction, godly writings, and anything that edifies.
- *Continual prayer for self, others, and that God's will be done.
- *Continued battle against sin (see XV.Our Dirty Laundry)
- *Ongoing self-correction and confession of sin to God and trusted believers.
- *Good works when able: physically and mentally aiding others in need, admonishing others in loving fashion, Spreading the Gospel if and when appropriate.

~Make your decision for Christ today

