

## BAPTISM: TRADING IN THE “OLD” FOR THE “NEW”

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I recently heard of a young man in his early teens who had started attending a Christian school. And unlike most schools today, this Christian school teaches the most important subject of all—it requires each of its students to take a course in Christian theology. And in one class, the teacher taught that when a person who is saved in Christ dies, they will eventually receive a brand new resurrected body. Well, this greatly upset this young man, because he was completely satisfied with the body that he now has. (Hence the thoughts of a teenager—wait until he gets into his 60’s and beyond. I expect that then he’ll change his tune.) In any event, at least as things currently stand, he likes his old body, and doesn’t want a new one. Now I am not sure as to whether or not this young man has ever been baptized, but if he hasn’t been, I hope that he soon will be. And if that time comes, I hope that someone will sit him down and explain to him that baptism addresses this very issue that seems to presently concern him so, because baptism actually points to that resurrected body—the one that we will receive when Jesus comes again. Baptism is all about breaking those ties with the old self and embracing a new self in Jesus Christ. But, that is truly hard for so many people. They don’t want to give up that old way of life. They cling to it—many to the very end. And when that happens—they have no prospects of salvation, no hope in that resurrected body to come. And in order to see that, let’s consider a little bit of the history of Baptism.

For the Jews of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, baptism was something that was offered to Gentiles who wanted to join the Jewish faith. This Jewish baptism was self-administered—you would simply entered into a ritual pool where you ceremoniously washed yourself while reciting the *shema*, “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Deuteronomy 6:4<sup>1</sup> But, baptism—as practiced by John the Baptist—was a quite different from anything the Jews had ever practiced in the past. John the Baptist added a unique twist to the way that he baptized. Rather than dipping water on yourself, under John’s baptism you would be completely immersed in water—not just to show you were joining the faith—but to declare the repentance of your sins, i.e., to show that you were deliberately turning from your former ways and headed in a completely new direction—one pointed to Jesus Christ. And as we will see, that new direction is pointed toward our resurrected bodies as well.

In this sense, Baptism is highly symbolic of the actual reality of what it means to come to Jesus and to have true faith in Him. When you go under the water, it shows that you are burying your sins in the waters of baptism and then being raised into the newness of life in Jesus Christ. This raising up from a watery grave is an important symbol of our faith. It is a symbol of one’s faith in our salvation made

possible by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the atonement of our sins.<sup>2</sup> It is the symbol of the resurrected bodies that will be given to those who love Jesus. Baptism by the **full immersion under water** best pictures this essential burial and a resurrection.

Now there are many Bible scholars who have written in depth treatises to describe all of this. Page after page, volumes upon volumes have been written to describe the nature of baptism. But, when it comes right down to it, Paul gives the best treatise on baptism and what it means to those who experience it in true faith. In his letter to the Church in Rome, Paul writes: <sup>4</sup> For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. <sup>5</sup> Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as He was. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. <sup>7</sup> For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. <sup>8</sup> And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with Him. <sup>9</sup> We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and He will never die again. Death no longer has any power over Him. <sup>10</sup> When He died, He died once to break the power of sin. But now that He lives, He lives for the glory of God. <sup>11</sup> So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. Romans 6:4-11 (NLT2)

Here, Paul describes how our immersion in the waters of baptism directly relates to Jesus' death on the Cross, his burial in the tomb, and His resurrection from the dead. And he tells that all of this was brought about "**by the glorious power**" of God the Father. Now, I want you to notice something here. Notice the overriding spiritual change that takes place in the hearts of those who are willing to leave the old body—the old way of life—behind upon publically proclaiming their commitment to Christ as part of their baptism experience. Paul tells us that the act of baptism units us together with Christ in the likeness of His death. That's an important statement because baptism reflects this **in the here and now** and corresponds to the surrender of our spirits to God **in this life**. And God, in return, gives us something. He gives us a **new heart**—not one of stone as existed in your old life, but one reflecting a spiritual re-birth in which we receive a new and responsive heart.<sup>3</sup> So, baptism symbolizes the fact that God gives us a "**new body**" now which provides for a wholly different mode of existence—not only upon our future resurrection when we receive glorious resurrected bodies far better than the shell in which we now reside—but here in this present life when we undergo a cleansing of our spirits from the stains of sin.<sup>4</sup>

You see, the baptism practiced by John the Baptist signaled all of this. But, as a prerequisite, he insisted that the participants in this new baptism must give a testimony of a radically changed life

marked first and foremost by the repentance of their sins. All of which naturally causes us to ask an important question, and it is this: If one of the requirements of baptism is the repentance of sins, then why did Jesus Himself come forward and ask John to baptize Him? Jesus had nothing to repent of, so why would the sinless Son of God need to be baptized? Now that is something that appears puzzling to people today. At first, it even puzzled John the Baptist. After all, it was John who replied to Jesus' request to be baptized by saying, "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you, so why are you coming to me?" Matthew 3:14 (NLT2) Do you know how Jesus responded to him? Jesus turned to John and said that He needed to be baptized to "***fulfill all righteousness.***"<sup>5</sup> In other words, Jesus' own baptism was directly forecasting the very purpose of His mission in coming here to earth. By submitting to baptism, Jesus was predicting that He would be a crucified, buried, and yet rise from the dead again. (Incidentally, this baptism of Jesus happens to be one of the clearest depictions of the Trinity that we find anywhere in the Scriptures where Father, Son and Holy Spirit all make their presence known in this most Holy of baptism scenes.<sup>6</sup>)

But, John made it clear that his baptism was not on the same scale as the baptism that Jesus offers to those who commit their lives to Him. John said: <sup>11</sup> "With water I baptize those who repent of their sins; but someone else is coming, far greater than I am, so great that I am not worthy to carry his shoes! He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." <sup>12</sup> He will separate the chaff from the grain, burning the chaff with never-ending fire and storing away the grain." Matthew 3:11-12 (TLB) Now, when John refers to the kind of baptism that Jesus gives as being one of "***the Holy Spirit and fire,***" what does he mean? Well, they are two very different baptisms that are reserved for two very different groups of people. And every person who ever lived will fall into one of those groups or the other. The ***baptism of the Holy Spirit*** is given to all those who truly repent and commit their lives to Jesus, and this happens the moment one comes to have true faith in Jesus and completely surrenders to Him. As such, it is a ***baptism of blessing***. But, the ***baptism of fire*** is far from being any blessing. Rather, it is a ***baptism of judgment*** reserved for those who, despite claiming to love God, only go through the motions of accepting Christ. But, the way in which they live their lives fails to show any evidence of repentance. Like that teenage boy in the Christian school, they want to hang on to their worldly bodies, representing their old lives, and thus reject the newness of life that comes with true repentance and submission to Jesus. In the end, they'll be like that chaff that's thrown into the fire—only it's the hottest of fires in a place called Hell.<sup>7</sup> For that teenage boy, and for you and for me, we are all faced with the choice as to which baptism we will receive—the ***one of blessing*** or the ***one of judgment***. And in this world, choosing

the baptism of the Holy Spirit and its accompanying blessing always comes at a great cost. There is a price to pay if you choose to follow Jesus—the world will always make sure of that.

Jim Denison is a pastor and the founder of the Denison Forum, which is a nonprofit Christian news outlet that reports current events from a Christian perspective. When he was in college, he went on a missionary trip to Malaysia where he attended a small church. At one of the services, a teenage girl came forward expressing her commitment to follow Jesus and wanted to be baptized right then and there. But, Denison saw something a bit odd over by the door to the church. There sat two worn-out suitcases that he'd not noticed before. So he asked the pastor of the church who they belonged to. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just come forward to be baptized. The pastor explained: "***Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian, she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage [along with her to church].***"<sup>8</sup> This teenager had come to realize exactly what it means to leave the "***old body***" behind, and embrace the newness of Christ. It will often entail a great sacrifice, but one that is completely worth it because that new way of life—that "***new body***" that baptism symbolizes—can bear so much more than the old one ever could. Why?—because Jesus' burdens are light. Jesus said: <sup>28</sup> "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

<sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB)

Sometimes it takes people a long time to realize that. The late Pat Summerall, who was a football star for the New York Giants and a famed sports announcer for so many years, had a hard time putting down his burden and accepting the lighter one Jesus offers. Not until he was in his late sixties was he able to lay his burden of alcoholism at the feet of Jesus when Summerall finally came forward to be baptized. Reflecting upon his baptism, this is what he said: "***I went down in the water, and when I came up it was like a 40-pound weight had been lifted from me. I have a happier life, a healthy life, and a more positive feeling about life than ever before.***" But it was even more than a "***positive feeling***" that he experienced. In addition, he now hungered for much different things than just a stiff drink. Rather, when he'd go from one town to another to give a telecast of a football game, he wouldn't be searching for a bar, as he'd always done in the past. No, he then searched out something else. He'd be looking for a church that had prayer meeting or Bible study that he could attend before announcing the football game. Summerall said: "***It's like an alcoholic looking for a drink. If he wants it bad enough, he can find it—no matter what. I'm like that when it comes to finding prayer services and Bible studies. No matter where I am working, I know that they're out there and I can find them.***"<sup>9</sup> The old body craved booze. The new body hungers for the Word of God.

And so, what should we say to that teenager in the Christian School who has the blessing of a theology teacher who informed him of this “**new body**” offered by Christ—that “**new body**” manifested by the public act of baptism? Well, I think it would be a good thing to inform him that he needs to seriously re-think his position. We need to let him know that holding on to the “**old body**” means holding on to the ways of this world. But, those who surrender to Christ know that holding to worldly ways is a dead-end game. Addressing the Father and speaking of His true followers, Jesus said: “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” John 17:14 (NASB) Like so many people, this young man in the theology class seems to be procrastinating when it comes to trading in the “**old**” for the “**new**.” Yet, waiting on that decision can be an eternally fatal mistake.

Lorena Garlington almost made that mistake. As a young girl, she says that she accepted Jesus mentally, yet never really accepted Him as far as a spiritual commitment is concerned. And because of that, she never got around to experiencing the waters of baptism—well, almost never. She did finally get around to it just a couple of months before her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Just before her pastor dipped her into the water, she looked him in the eye and said, “***I’ve struggled with this so long because I know the Bible says you should be baptized.***” But, when she emerged from the water, she had a big smile on her face, and shouted with joy, “***This is the greatest day! It's the best thing that's happened to me in years***”—maybe even in almost 100 years.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible tells us that the Apostle Peter said to all those listening: “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 NASB Now is the time that that special gift will be given to the three who are coming forward today to be baptized in the waters of this pond—publically trading in the “**old**” and to walk in the “**newness of Jesus Christ.**” For as Paul said: “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT2)

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor  
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<sup>1</sup> Paige Patterson, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "BAPTISM," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

<sup>2</sup> Paige Patterson, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "BAPTISM," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 36:26 (NLT2) And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.

<sup>4</sup> Alastair Roberts, "Sealed for Resurrection: Baptism and the Objectivity of the Body," Theopolis Institute, theopolisinstitute.com (December 3, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 3:15 (NIV) Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV) <sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." See: Paige Patterson, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: A Thorough, Yet Easy-to-Read Bible Commentary That Turns Complicated Theology Into Practical Understanding*, ed. Arthur Farstad, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1211.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond McHenry, *Stories for the Soul* (Hendrickson, 2001), p. 48; submitted by Steve May, Humboldt, Tennessee; *PreachingToday.com*.

<sup>9</sup> "Announcer Pat Summerall Enjoys His Salvation," *PreachingToday.com*.

<sup>10</sup> Jim L. Wilson, *Fresh Illustrations*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Baptism," 6-22-2000.