

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM AND ITS TRUE SIGNIFICANCE

By Bob Stewart

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.” Genesis 1:1-2

The “waters” here are understood by the ancient Israelites as the most pure possible because they were created perfect by God and no impurity existed in them. Therefore, fresh running water became the image of “clean” and so when God commanded washing in it for the specific purpose of attending to spiritual matters, those who obeyed Him and immersed themselves in it would be deemed ceremonially clean.

The beautiful meanings in Christian baptism flows from these ancient Jewish cleansing ceremonies commanded by God for the Israelites millenniums ago. The common act of ritual and spiritual cleansing prior to approaching or engaging in a holy act commanded by God applied to the priests, Levites and to common people. This was in force from the tabernacle period beginning with Moses, through the temple period of the first century.

The important thing to remember is that this cleansing act demonstrates the concept of “change.” The idea of “changing” or making a “transition” from one state of being to another is a key factor in the relationship between sinful people and a holy God. God cannot be approached or have a relationship with sinful man unless a change has transpired in him.¹ Thus, both cleansing or purification with the purpose of changing from an unclean state to a clean one was required. It was not the act itself that was the key, it was the obedience in following through with the act that was seen as faith in what God had commanded. Faith has always been the key.²

Sacrifices for sin, presentations for healings, dedications, and preparation for holy days were some of the things involved. We see examples of this in both the Old and New Testament.

The history of this practice is important as the reasons for doing it were transformed when the New Covenant and those who by faith in Christ came under its

¹ Exodus 33:20, “But He said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.’”

² The story of Naaman the commander of the armies of Aram and also suffering from leprosy found in II Kings 5:1-27, is a good illustration of this point.

provisions.

Again, in the Old Testament, the water used in the ritual cleansing for the Israelites was to be fresh, pure, and uncontaminated. So, water from a fresh source such as a river, stream or well was “gathered” in pots and brought to a place where it was then poured into a basin large enough for immersion of either objects or people.

This “gathering” of water stems from Genesis, chapter one, where the water created by God in the beginning is deemed to be pure and that which the Spirit of God used to bring forth life. And so, in Genesis 1:9 we read,

"Then God said, 'Let the waters below the heavens be *gathered* into one place, and let the dry land appear, and it was so.'

The Hebrew word for "gathered" is "qavah." The pool for gathered water in which these ritual cleansings are held is called a "Mikvah" from the same root. This exact word is found in Isaiah 22:11 and translated "reservoir" in the NASB.

“And you made a *reservoir* between the two walls for the waters of the old pool.”

The first mention of a container for this ritual purification is found in Exodus 30:18-21,

18: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. 19: "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; 20: when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire *sacrifice* to the LORD. 21: "So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."

Then, in Leviticus 14:6-9; 15:5-10, 13, 16, 10-27; 16:24, 26, 28; 17:15; Numbers 19:7-8, 19, all speak of total immersion for an unclean condition. The English word is “bathe,” “rachats” in the Hebrew.

Solomon's commission of a great washing tub is found in II Chronicles 4:2-6,

2: "Also he made the cast *metal* sea, ten cubits from brim to brim, circular in form, and its height *was* five cubits and its circumference thirty cubits.³ 3: Now figures like oxen *were* under it *and* all around it, ten cubits, entirely encircling

³ About 42-45 feet in circumference, making the diameter about 13-14 feet and the depth 7-8 feet deep. The metal was a about 2-3 inches thick.

the sea. The oxen *were* in two rows, cast in one piece. 4: It stood on twelve oxen, three facing the north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east; and the sea *was set* on top of them, and all their hindquarters turned inwards. 5: It was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like the brim of a cup, *like* a lily blossom; it could hold 3,000 baths.⁴ 6: He also made ten basins in which to wash, and he set five on the right side and five on the left to rinse things for the burnt offering; but the sea *was* for the priests to wash in."

It looks as if any priest entering the temple area was to first, wash himself using soap and water and then, second, become immersed in the ceremonial cleansing that had been ordained by God early on. The water in the laver and the "sea" was essentially natural rainwater or water brought in by pots from the river and poured in. The ceremonial cleansing has a spiritual significance of purification and was not just for the purposes of hygiene.

All persons were to wash clean before entering the temple grounds or embracing any ceremony. Women who had given birth had commandments for this and for several other matters relating to menstrual cycles and sexual activity. Men as well for sexual activities.

The immersion ritual is similar to what we know as baptism. The term "baptism" (bapto) is a Greek word, and it is used in the LXX⁵ as a translation of the Hebrew טָבַל (tah-bal) to wash completely. Two other Hebrew words are used for ritual and normal bathing or washing, ("rah-chats" and "kabas"). The ceremony is traditionally called "tvilah" from the Hebrew "tah-bal." The two are very similar in method as "tvilah" was to be performed in a water source from a natural spring, river, rain water and such in which the participant is to be fully immersed.

Immersion in this ritual manner was to establish a restoration of spiritual and personal cleanliness before being allowed to participate in any temple activities.

After the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E. and the beginning of the rebuilding of it in 525 B.C.E., the washings were accomplished by immersion in the Jordan, or in pools (mikvehs) filled with running water, rain water, water brought in pots or a mixture as long as the greater percentage was fresh and naturally flowing water. This was to honor the creation of water by God before all else was created and thus it was pure and unadulterated. At the same time the practice of using the mikveh to illustrate or demonstrate a person's conversion to Judaism was introduced. There was the need it was determined to do a ritual cleansing for those coming from other religions or for Gentiles so they would be

⁴ 2,000 according to I Kings 7:26.

⁵ Septuagint

ceremonially clean to participate in Jewish activities and holy days.

As we approach the time of Jesus, “baptism” was also exercised to display a person's commitment to a new spiritual reality or religious faith as we saw when one converted to Judaism. We first see it used in a slightly different way and for a different purpose as John the Baptist appears. Our first encounter with baptism in the New Testament is in the person of John the Baptist. In Matthew, Mark and Luke a specific purpose for this baptism is mentioned,

Matthew 3:11, (John is speaking) "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Mark 1:4-5, 4: "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5: And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."

Luke 3:3, "And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins..."

We see in this baptism of John and Jesus' disciples that people came to confess their sins and repent. This was very unusual. Confession of sins was not done publicly like this. But to confess sin either publicly, to John, or to Jesus' disciples at baptism, and then be baptized in preparation for the coming Messiah and God's kingdom was unheard of. This is why so many flocked to discover what was going on and asked questions about what they were doing.

Then we have a more revealing picture of what John was doing in John 1:19-31,

19: This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20: And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21: They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22: Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23: He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." 24: Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25: They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26: John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. 27: "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28: These things took place

in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. 29: The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30: "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'⁶ 31: "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32: John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33: "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'⁷ 34: "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."⁷

Then we have the strangest account in Matthew 3:13-15,

13: "Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. 14: But John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' 15: 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."

This act has caused commentators considerable difficulty. All recognize this is not a baptism of confession of sin or repentance, nor is it some example for others to follow. Certainly, it is not a fulfilling a requirement "to be saved" for the son of God Himself was and is sinless. Nor is it required by any statute or ordinance in the Law. Jesus did not need "ceremonial spiritual cleansing" and John recognized this seeking for Jesus to baptize him instead. So, what is the point?

Is this act a symbol of Jesus' transition from a worldly life to a ministry? Some think so, others do not. Baptism does represent a shift from one thing to another. There is a past to move from and a future to enter. In Jesus' case, He calls it the means to "fulfill all righteousness." And He notes that it is fitting for "US" to do so. So, Jesus links Himself with John in this act of "fulfilling all righteousness." This means to complete, bring to a conclusion, finish, and fulfill "righteousness." The Greek can also be translated "justice." I suggest that Jesus, in being baptized, signifies that he will draw to a conclusion the entire righteousness and justice of God's plan of redemption in Himself. In other words, Jesus' being baptized completes the need for cleansing for all mankind and now, those who come to believe in him are clean (and considered righteous) before God.

⁶ John was born six months before Jesus was, yet he makes this claim and this tells us that John knew of Jesus' preexistence.

⁷ See also John 3:22-23, 3:26, 4:1-2, and 10:40,

This concept is supported by Paul who says this,

"But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:21-26

And: Romans 10:4-10,

4: "For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. 5: For Moses writes of the righteousness that is based on the Law, that the person who performs them will live by them. 6: But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: 'DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL GO UP INTO HEAVEN?'' (that is, to bring Christ down), 7: or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).' 8: But what does it say? 'THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART'—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9: that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10: for with the heart *a person* believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

I suggest that Jesus' comments and baptism may reflect the culmination and fulfillment of the Law in His own person and sacrifice. Under the New Covenant instituted at His death (and verified by His resurrection) those who come to Christ in faith as their Savior and Lord are afforded the provisions of the New Covenant and are set free from the condemnation of death by the Old. Thus, they are accounted righteous, not by their own nature or any works, but by faith.⁸

In Romans 5:20-21, Paul notes,

20: "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin

⁸ Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 5:1, 6; Romans 5:19; 6:17-18, Titus 3:3-6. Though Jesus took away the sins of the world (John 1:29 and I John 2:1-2), salvation and life are by faith. The issue now is not sin, but life or death, faith or unbelief and rejection of what God has given as His gift to mankind in Christ.

increased, grace abounded all the more, 21: so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now, does this have any bearing on the meaning and understanding of baptism in the early church? Yes, it does. There is more significance to this act that transcend the “washings” under the law.

I.

First, Christian baptism then, is only for those who believe in Christ and have thus made the transition by their faith from the old to the new, from death to life, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light whether they be Jews or Gentiles.⁹ There is much more, but first let’s see the evidence that this act is only for those who have come to faith in Christ alone for their salvation, and not just joined an organization or exercised some ritual.

For example,

Acts 10:44-48,

44: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45: All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46: For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47: 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?' 48: And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."

In Acts 16:27-34 we have the account of the Philippian jailer and his family.

27: "When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28: But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" 29: And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30: and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31: They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32: And they spoke the word

⁹ Colossians 1:13; Galatians 3:35-29. This eliminates the practice of infant baptism and baptism for other reasons often instituted by churches such as becoming a member, assuring salvation, and the like. It also questions the idea of sprinkling, pouring and other such means of “baptizing.” Yet, under the New Covenant, there would be exceptions for those who would be unable to be immersed, such as those bed ridden and so on.

of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33: And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*. 34: And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

We are seeing that the sequence is regular. Hear the word, repent, believe and then be baptized. The same in Acts 18:8 (in Corinth), "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."

Then, in Acts we have the passage in Acts 19:1-6 where Paul was approaching Ephesus on his third missionary journey,

1: "It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus and found some disciples. 2: He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they *said* to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' 3: And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' 4: Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' 5: When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6: And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying."

In addition, we see quite often that baptism is commanded to be done after one expresses one's faith in Christ. Even Jesus, in Matthew 28:18-20 (entitled by the church - "The Great Commission") is quoting as saying,

18: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20: teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This indicates that the "disciples" made from believing the message of the Gospel are to be baptized, not just in the traditional Jewish manner, but in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This "naming" places them under the power, protection and provision of their new family. It separates them from all other worldly relationships and connections.

Summarizing, baptism affirms that the sin of the baptized believer has been washed away and exchanged for righteousness. This is the first “change” or “transition” the is represented by baptism.¹⁰

II.

Second, the image of burial and resurrection is easy to see in the ceremony. Whether it was the Jewish purification washings, or the repentance washings with John the Baptist, Christian baptism is done by full immersion under the water. The word “baptism” itself (βάπτισμα – baptisma) means to “dip,” “sink” or “immerse.”

For example, John 13:26 reads,

“Jesus then answered, ‘That man is the one for whom I shall *dip* the piece of bread and give it to him.’ “So, when He had *dipped* the piece of bread, He took and gave it to Judas, *the son* of Simon Iscariot.”

The words “dip” and “dipped” are from “bapto,” the root of “baptisma.” In Luke 16:24 we also have the same word used for “dip.”

“And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, so that he may *dip* the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’”

In the Old Testament, the ceremonial “washings” were done in a manner that completely immersed the object or person being washed. The Hebrew is “rachats” and an example of this can be found in II Chronicles 4:6, “He also made ten basins in which to wash, and he set five on the right side and five on the left to rinse things for the burnt offering; but the Sea *was* for the priests to wash in.”¹¹

This is reflected in baptism. And there are many other facets to this as well. When one steps into the water, he or she must understand that they are, by faith, submersing themselves into His death and that the existence of sin, filth, evil, and self is now buried with Him and washed away forever. Then rising in Christ, (clothed in Him)¹² they recognize their cleansing (by faith), accounted as righteous and now rising into a pure, new life created for them by God. Of course, as we

¹⁰ John, in both I John 5:6 and Revelation 7:14 uses the image of the saints washed in the blood of Jesus. This of course would refer to righteousness reckoned to believers in Him.

¹¹ II Chronicles 4:2-5 describes the “sea.” It was a large metal basin, circular in shape about 14 feet wide and seven feet tall and held thousands of gallons of water. Other references include; Isaiah 4:4; Ezekiel 16:4; 9 and 23:40.

¹² Galatians 3:27

saw, those of faith have already been made clean. Baptism is a public display and personal experience of this reality. For example, Jesus said to His disciples,

“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you remain in Me.”
John 15:3-4

In John 13:5-11, while preparing to wash the feet of His disciples, the following narrative takes place,

5: “Then He poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples’ feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself. 6: So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, ‘Lord, You are washing my feet?’ 7: Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later.’ 8: Peter said to Him, ‘Never shall You wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me.’ 9: Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!’ 10: Jesus said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet; otherwise he is completely clean. And you are clean—but not all *of you*.’ 11: For He knew the one who was betraying Him; *it was* for this reason *that* He said, ‘Not all *of you* are clean.’”

Because Judas did not believe in who Jesus was, he was not clean. Faith in Jesus makes us clean before God, and baptism is the portrait of that truth in the lives of believers. For example, it was not by some work or obedience that Abraham was declared “righteous” before God, but as the scripture says in Genesis 15:4-6,

4: “Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him (Abram), saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ 5: And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ 6: “Then he believed in the LORD; and He credited it to him as righteousness.”

It has always been by faith, not by any human effort, even keeping the law perfectly.¹³ As Paul writes in Galatians 3:21-24,

21: “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? Far from it! For if a

¹³ Philippians 3:1-7; Ephesians 2:8-9

law had been given that was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22: But the Scripture has confined everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23: But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being confined for the faith that was destined to be revealed. 24: Therefore, the Law has become our guardian *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.”

III.

Third, as we continue, we have seen that under the New Covenant the immersion in water is to be in the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. This takes on, for the believer, a new bond with God Himself. The name of God invokes the power of God bringing His own to eternal life even from death. The burial of the old and the resurrection to the new are attributes when one is bonded to Jesus by faith. We have now entered into Christ and He into us. That is the bonding. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Galatians 3:27.

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

To be “clothed with Christ” is basically to be shielded from every evil spiritual power as well as from the condemnation we deserve for our sinfulness and everything that could separate us from God and His gift of eternal life through faith in His son Jesus Christ, even the finality of death. Paul makes this clear in Romans 6:5-11,

5: “For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6: knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7: for the one who has died is freed from sin. 8: Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9: knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10: For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all *time*; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11: So, you too, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Here is an illustration I like to employ about that. Picture visiting a mortuary. In the preparation room is a dead person. And being dead, we can stick a knife in him, shoot him, burn him, torture him and anything else and it cannot affect him. In Christ we have died to this world and the condemnation of the Law, and nothing

can affect that any longer than it can affect Christ in whom we are and He in us.

Paul concludes his first letter to the church at Corinth with this statement,

“Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written: ‘DEATH HAS BEEN SWALLOWED UP in victory. ‘WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR VICTORY? WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR STING?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (15:51-57)

Second, being “clothed with Christ” means we are one with Him along with all the true believers in history. We are all family. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:25-29,

25: “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. 26: For you are all sons *and daughters* of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27: For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29: And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.”

And, in I Corinthians 12:12-14,

12: “For just as the body is one and *yet* has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14: For the body is not one part, but many.”

Third, being clothed in Christ is the same as being in Christ. In Romans 8:1-2 Paul says,

1: “Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

And in 12:4-5,

4: For just as we have many parts in one body and all the body's parts do not have the same function, 5: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually parts of one another."

Then we read also that Christ is in us, seen in the following passages:

Colossians 1:27, "... to whom God willed to make known what the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles is, *the mystery* that is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

I Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

I John 4:4, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

There is much to this, but first we now have another portrait of change or transition coming as a result of faith in Christ, that of burying the old and rising to the new. This is a major theme for we who are in Christ. We rise to a new life, a new attitude, and a new purpose and goal. We are freed from death, despair, hopelessness and the futility of a purposelessness life.

Baptism in Jesus' name¹⁴ attaches to the ceremony the recognition of God in Christ as one's ultimate authority, and most of all portrays a shift from one identity to another and one reality to another. Believers are no longer to be led by the drives of the flesh or of the world but live in it by trusting in God.

This does not mean they will not struggle with those things and sometimes fail. God has taken care of all of that in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. This is not important to Him. What is important is their heart and desire. When one becomes a true Christian, their "want toos" begin to change in their heart and mind. They change from wanting to indulge in the world and the things of the flesh to want to be closer to God, walk with Him, seek out His presence and truth, be a different and better person to please God rather than themselves and to learn how to do that in this world.

So, they are not to go back to or continue in sin just because they are under the grace of God in this new relationship.

In Romans 6:1-9, Paul puts it this way,

¹⁴ Or in the "Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit"

6:1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2: May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3: Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4: Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5: For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6: knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7: for he who has died is freed from sin. 8: Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9: knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.”

Romans 7:5-6,

5: “For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. 6: But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.”

Colossians 3:9-10,

9: “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10: and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...”

Hebrews 10:19-20,

19: Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20: by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh...’

II Corinthians 5:17,

17: “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

II Corinthians 3:5,

5: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being*

from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, 6: who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

For Paul, the act of Baptism is essential for the Christian in terms of expressing and confirming one's uniting with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection and living a new life in Him and for Him.

In so doing, we express our unity with Christ as well as the doing away with the life and condition of sin and its hold on us leaving it, as it were, in the grave while rising to a new life in Christ, totally free from the grip all that sin (according to the Law) and this world had on us.

IV.

Fourth, water baptism signifies that those participating recognize that their new lives in Christ are a complete change and transition from one realm to another. “Change” and “transition” are the big things. Summarizing so far, here is what that involves. By faith in Christ (and nothing of themselves) and portrayed and experienced in water baptism by immersion, God has moved us from: A. Sinfulness to cleanliness and righteousness.¹⁵ B. Death to life.¹⁶ C. The kingdom of this world to His kingdom.¹⁷ D. The family of man (Adam) to the family of God and His Son.¹⁸ E. From hopelessness to hope.¹⁹ F. From living a life of purposelessness to living a life with purpose.²⁰ G. From the old sinful, dead, empty fleshy life to the new free, alive, full, Spirit led life in everything.²¹ H. From living under the direction of the world, the flesh and the devil to living under the Lordship of Christ.²²

In I Peter 3:18-22, and in I Corinthians 10:1-2 we also have the added theme of deliverance from bondage and threat of destruction corresponding to this as well.

First, I Peter 3:18-22,

18: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that

¹⁵ Romans 5:17; Galatians 2:21; Philippians 1:8-11 etc.

¹⁶ Romans 5:18; 6:3-4; 6:23; 8:2; II Timothy 1:8-10, etc.

¹⁷ Colossians 1:13

¹⁸ Romans 5:14; I Corinthians 15:22, 45;

¹⁹ Romans 8:24-25; 15:13; Colossians 1:3-5; II Thessalonians 2:16; I Timothy 1:1 etc.

²⁰ Romans 15:4-7; II Corinthians 5:3-5; I Peter 3:9 etc.

²¹ Romans 6:4; 7:6.

²² Galatians 4:6; 5:16-26 etc.

He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19: in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, 20: 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. 21: 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, 22: who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."²³

Baptism corresponds to the rescue Noah experienced during the flood which saved him and his family. But it wasn't the water that brought "salvation" (rescue), it was the Ark.

Corresponding to the Ark, is the resurrection of Christ. Baptism is seen as a type of the Noah experience. But it was Noah's faith and obedience in building the Ark that brought them safely through the water. Rising from and above the water then, becomes the means whereby salvation is recognized.

So, the waters of baptism likened to Noah's rescue from the flood in the Ark, corresponds with our salvation. Salvation (σωτηρία – soh-teh-ria) means rescue, deliverance, safety, and preservation. By faith and obedience to the gospel one secures salvation and eternal life due to Christ's resurrection. Baptism reflects this truth.

Next, the Exodus also pictures this as well. Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:1-2,

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea...”

As God had a purpose for Moses, and him being protected by God's presence assured in the cloud, all who trusted in God's work in Moses were bonded with him as they were rescued and delivered by faith from the land of bondage through the Red Sea to the promised land. Like the armies of Pharaoh, none who were not of His people were allowed to follow.

²³ For more about verse 21, see my work entitled, "Is Baptism Required for Salvation" on my website, www.bibleclassroom.org, under "controversial topics."

V.

Fifth, all of this is in keeping with God's New Covenant in Christ and His intention of creating a completely new heavens and earth where the righteous dwell. Notice the teachings of the apostles. The reason is that each person who has come to Jesus in faith is now under a "New Covenant" – that is a new relationship with God.

This new relationship with God is because their faith in His Son and all He did for us causes God to bring them into His family by new birth (or adoption). As a true child of God all their past sins and everything they found in themselves disagreeable to God is washed away by the blood of Jesus, all the past present and future. God will never see them in that way ever again because of His grace and love for them

II Peter 3:11-13,

11: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12: looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13: Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

Revelation 21:1-5,

1: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2: Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God'. 4: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5: "Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' "And He said to me, "'Write, for these words are true and faithful.'"

VI.

Sixth, Christian baptism demonstrates not just the leaving of the old life (putting it to death) and this world of darkness but also embracing our new life in God's kingdom. Paul wrote of this in Colossians 1:13-14,

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

Later Paul wrote of God’s similar practice for himself,

“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!”

(II Timothy 4:16-18.)

It is important to remember that Jesus came preaching the good news (gospel) of the Kingdom of God as did the apostles.²⁴ Ultimately, entrance into God’s own kingdom is the goal of those whose journey is by faith in Jesus.

Peter notes this in his second epistle, chapter 1:10-11,

10: “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; 11: for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

James 2:5,

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”

Hebrews 12:28,

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

²⁴ See: Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 9:11; 9:60; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 28:23, 30-31; Matthew 4:17 (Matthew’s term “kingdom of heaven” is a substitute for using the divine name which would offend the Jews he was reaching out to. Only Matthew uses this terminology and only uses the term “kingdom of God” four times, all quotes from Jesus Himself.

II Timothy 4:1,

“I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:”

Colossians 3:1-4,

1: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2: Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3: For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4: When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

And then, my favorite passage, Ephesians 2:1-7,

1: “And you were dead in your offenses and sins, 2: in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3: Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest. 4: But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5: even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6: and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, 7: so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Verse 7 expresses God’s goal for us because of our faith in His Son. He has seated us with His Son in the heavens “so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Our faith in Christ Jesus grants us, by His love and grace, all of these blessings portrayed in Christian baptism.

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