

What it means to be baptized

Literal baptism cleanses and unites ceremonially by means of water. Figurative baptism cleanses and unites by means of spirit. It accomplishes what water baptism accomplishes, but without the towel.

Today, we are baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3-4). Being a figurative baptism (it's not a ceremony or ritual involving water), it unites and cleanses by means of spirit.



Everyone going into the Jordan with John came out co-members of the same club. Answering "Yes" to "Were you baptized by John?" meant that you identified with the coming kingdom and its Messiah. Acknowledging the baptism of Christ's death, on the other hand, puts one into the club known as the Body of Christ. It unites its members, not with Christ's kingdom, but with Christ Himself.

When I see someone going into a lake with a preacher and a towel, I can't help but think, "That person is not identifying with the same organization God has called me into."

True enough.

So I count my blessings.

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

Baptism has people over a barrel—oops, I mean *in* a barrel

Baptism is a scriptural teaching. But then so is Circumcision. And so is having your sins confessed onto the head of a goat. And so is facing the temple in Jerusalem when you pray. And so is building an ark.

The two men at right are baptizing a prisoner at the Lapu-Lapu City Jail in Cebu, Philippines. This is the same country where religious zealots have themselves crucified on Good Friday. Am I comparing those who baptize with those who have themselves crucified?

Yes.

In 1 Peter 3:21, the disciple of Christ says that, as water saved the eight souls on the ark, "baptism is now saving you also..."

There was a day when baptism saved. True, Peter adds that baptism saves, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," but this is cooperative salvation, typical of the gospel of the Circumcision. According to this gospel (preached to Israelites), it is not the cross alone that saves, but the cross plus baptism—and repentance, for that matter. As Peter announced at Pentecost: "Repent and be baptized each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the pardon of your sins" (Acts 2:38).



Does this mean that repentance and baptism are necessary today? Should we be preaching the message that Christ saves from sin, or that pardoned from sin comes through the cross of Christ *plus* baptism and repentance? Isn't that something we ought to know for sure? Maybe we ought to be asking ourselves:

What has God said about baptism *lately*?

Ignoring what God has said lately about any important topic could cause a person to build an ark, circumcise for salvation, or sacrifice sheep.

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“...one Lord, one faith, one baptism”

Ephesians 4:5

If water baptism (1 Pet. 3:21) and spirit baptism (1 Cor. 12:13) are both scriptural baptisms, but there is only one baptism today (Ephesians 4:5), then which is it:

...water or spirit?



“Wow. What a great question to ask someone who believes in water baptism.”

...baptism in a barrel

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The problem lies in dividing the scriptures into “Old Testament” and “New Testament.” As a general guide to living, most people figure that if it’s in the Old Testament we’re not supposed to do it, but if it’s in the New Testament, we are. The problem is that there are multiple distinctions within even the New Testament (the Greek scriptures), that must be recognized.

For instance, “Repent and be baptized for the pardon of your sins,” is a New Testament doctrine. Are we supposed to do it then? How can we, when this message was given, not only exclusively to Israelites, but to those Israelites who crucified Christ? Two verses before this charge, Peter says (Acts 2:36): “Let all the house of Israel know certainly, then, that God makes Him Lord as well as Christ—this Jesus Whom *you* crucify!” The repentance of the context had to do with changing one’s mind concerning killing the Messiah. How can we repent of this today? We can’t. *I* didn’t yell my brains out to free Barabbas. Did you?

I didn’t yell my brains out to free Barabbas.

What about John the Baptist? Should we be baptized in John’s baptism? Sure; right after we bring our turtle-doves to the temple.

Here was John’s baptism in a nutshell: “Repent! For near is the kingdom of the heavens!” (Mt. 3:2). This kingdom of the heavens was the Millennial kingdom promised to Israel. Baptism into John meant repenting of sin in preparation for this kingdom. *It had nothing to do with the cross.* That’s right. John’s baptism had nothing to do with “believing in Jesus” or “confessing the name of



Christ.” How could it, when Jesus Christ had yet to be introduced to the world? “He who is coming *after* me is stronger than I” (Mt. 3:11).

Paul brought a new message to the nations and, yes, Paul did baptize a few people early on—not into John’s baptism, but into the name of the Lord Jesus. Remember, baptism is a generic rite that ceremonially cleanses people and unites them to a common cause. But here is the key concerning Paul: His ministry went “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). In other words, the Paul of the middle of Acts is not the Paul of Ephesians. Paul gradually removed all rites and ceremonies from his message, so that it *eventually and finally* became a message of pure grace.

And that’s where it stands today. ■

What a Revelation!

YOU WERE BAPTIZED 2000 YEARS AGO

“Or are you ignorant that whoever are baptized into Christ Jesus, are baptized into His death? We, then, were entombed together with Him through baptism into death, that even as Christ was roused from among the dead through the glory of the Father, thus we also should be walking in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

When people ask if I’ve been baptized, I have the opportunity to herald Christ and say: “Yes. I was baptized 2000 years ago.”

To baptize in water today is to deny the great truth of baptism into Christ’s death. It is a returning to the killing of lambs for the forgiveness of sins.



“Or are you ignorant?”

Q&A

Does baptism of the holy spirit have to do with speaking in tongues?

In the book of Acts it does. John the Baptist said that the One coming after him would baptize “in holy spirit and fire” (Mt. 3:11). The holy spirit came on the disciples in the upper room, and they began speaking in different languages (Acts 2:4). Again we must ask: what has God done with spirit *lately*? Rather than “coming on” us today, the spirit of God makes its home *in* us (1 Cor. 3:16). The languages of Pentecost enabled the throng in Jerusalem to hear Peter’s message, each in their own language. There is no need, today, for this sort of spirit manifestation.

To say we need baptized in the holy spirit today is to deny the great truth of the spirit’s homing. We are not to seek a “second blessing” experience via an excavation of Pentecost. That era is old and decrepit. Today, we are blessed with *every* spiritual blessing, among the celestials, in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

The gospel that distinguishes people



The Circumcision gospel is in accord with flesh; it is the gospel that distinguishes people.

Circumcision was a rite performed on the flesh itself that distinguished the Israelite from those of other nations. The law of Moses, which came only to Israel, contained hundreds of things that people had to physically *do*, or else be disbarred from God’s favor. This not only distinguished Israel from the nations (the nations were at that time “alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and guests of the promise covenants, having no expectation and without God in the world”— Eph. 2:12), it distinguished Israelites from other Israelites.

For instance, if you gathered sticks on the Sabbath, you were stoned. If you rested on the Sabbath in accord with law, you ate a nice meal and *didn’t* get stoned. This engendered pride among Israelites: “Ha, ha. I ate a nice meal and you got stoned.”

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Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur (Philippians 2:14). Therefore, I shall rant.



Melody decommissioned the Great Commission

I almost joined a Great Commission church back in 1984. Last week I told you about Melody’s and my bicycle trip across the United States. We had our trials, yes, but on September 15 we pedaled happily into Silver Spring, Maryland, a day’s ride from our planned terminus at Ocean City. Here, we were to call upon the sister of an old co-worker of mine and her husband: the Rockdales. His name was Joe; hers I can’t remember. For the sake of convenience, I will call her Eva Braun.

The Rockdales were nice people, but they were heavily into DOING THINGS for God. There is nothing wrong with DOING THINGS for God, unless one feels the need to capitalize the words DOING THINGS, conveying to the reader the impression that the ministry of the Rockdales was maniacally of the flesh.

The Rockdales believed that The Great Commission—described by Jesus in the last verses of Matthew 28—was for today. A careful reading of this passage and the ensuing book of Acts shows that not only did the disciples never disciple all the nations, but neither did they baptize a single soul into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit. Besides, Jesus finishes His teaching with, “And lo! I am with you all the days till the conclusion of the eon!” and then promptly leaves. Obviously, this Great Commission is not to be fulfilled until Jesus returns to inaugurate the kingdom eon and set up the



disciples on twelve thrones. Well—not so obvious to Joe and Eva. Or to me, at the time. Joe and Eva pumped me with so much holy roller caffeine that I was ready to sell my soul to the Starbucks Jesus, convert the world to God, and promote the Rockdales to the status of Mt. 28 disciples.

I was ready to move to Silver Spring. “C’mon, Melody,” I said. “After this trip, let’s do it.” I’ll never forget the ensuing conversation. One evening, in the darkness of the Rockdale’s basement bunker, Melody whispered: “I don’t feel right about this. Be careful. This is not of God; it’s of the flesh. It sounds exciting, but God has to do an inner work in us first before we can go out. When we do go out, it will be with control and in accord with God’s timing.”

This is the same woman who once told me—back when I was still a Christian—that God was the Savior of all mankind. ■

...gospel (continued from page 2)



Modern Christians are proselytes of Judaism

Peter’s call to repentance and baptism at Pentecost was a call to a public display of an inward change. Christians like public displays. *Some* grace is fine, but a mixture of law leaves room for the acknowledgment of self. The Circumcision gospel allows for this.

James, writing to the Twelve Tribes, considers faith alone as insufficient to save (Js. 2:14). “Faith if it should not have works: it is dead by itself,” he writes (2:17). This is perfectly consistent with the gospel of the Circumcision. *The Circumcision is a gospel for the eyes.*

The gospel of the Uncircumcision, however, is different. Listen to Paul in 2 Cor. 5:16— “So that we, from now on, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless now we know Him so no longer.”

Paul’s is a gospel of faith, not flesh. In a gospel of faith and *no* works, boasting is debarred—completely (Rom. 3:27). This is what damns the gospel of the Uncircumcision for so many. It is why there will never be nearly as many members of the body of Christ today as there are proselytes of Judaism, that is: Christians. ■

* **Proselyte:** A new convert to some religion or religious sect.