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Baptized into Christ, Baptized into His Death

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The apostle has written of the ill effect that Adam's sin had upon mankind, and the wonderful grace available to us in Christ Jesus. He had asked, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" To this question he responded, "God forbid! We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live there? Or, are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ, were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection ..." (Romans 6:1-5).

Those who say that Paul taught the sinner is saved through faith before and without baptism need to read what the apostle actually said, rather than to trust what some man thinks Paul meant. In this Roman passage Paul teaches that baptism is the turning point in the sinner's life: He is a different person after baptism than he was before his baptism. Before baptism he walked in "oldness of life;" after baptism he walks in "newness of life." If, as the world affirms, the sinner is saved before he is baptized, then after he is baptized his life is exactly the opposite before his baptism; he is lost. Ridiculous as that may sound, there is no other conclusion which man could reach.

In baptism, however, we not only rise to walk in newness of life, we wash away our sins (Acts 22:16). In baptism we do not put away the filthiness of the flesh (take a bath) in baptism; we find the answer of a good conscious toward God (1 Peter 3:21). We can never have such an answer if we stop short of baptism. Paul wrote, "For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love toward man appeared, not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration (water, John 3:5) and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:3-5). The apostle told Titus we are not saved by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves; rather, we are saved through God's mercy in "the washing of regeneration." This passage tells us then that baptism is NOT a work of righteousness; it is the means through which God's mercy is richly poured out upon us. This agrees perfectly with Romans 6:4 where the same writer tells us that from baptism we rise to walk in newness of life. Baptism is the pivotal point, having a "before" and "after". Before baptism we walk in "oldness of life," and after baptism we walk in "newness of life." And as already observed, if we are saved before baptism, we are lost afterward; if we are lost before baptism, we are saved afterward.

Everything the Scriptures teach about the consequence of water baptism agrees with this conclusion. Look at each of these passages and see what results follows one's baptism: Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 3:21. So one, reading what these passages say, declares, "I understand. Baptism is for remission of sins." But then he adds, "But I was baptized."

Unfortunately, that does not solve the problem, even if one was baptized in times past. Baptism must be an act of faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). If one believes he is already saved before he is baptized, then his baptism is not an act of faith. Unless one understands and believes that his baptism puts him into Christ — into Christ's death, is the water of the new birth, and that he is not saved until he is baptized — his baptism is an empty act. There is no way he can remedy his circumstances until he does what Jesus commanded, believes that command, and is baptized to be saved.

Was your baptism done that you might be saved? If it was not, you need to be baptized again for the reason Jesus said all must be baptized (Mark 16:15-16). *Brighton, Sussex UK congregation*

The “One True Church”

L.A. Stauffer

An expression that is anathema among Protestants today is “the one true church.” In the universal or general sense they agree that there is only one true church, and that its members are known only to God who adds them to his family. In this sense they accept the Biblical teaching that “there is one body” (Ephesians 4:4). And to this we agree. But few, if any, believe there is “one true church” that is identifiable on earth.

Even many of our brethren have abandoned the idea of “restoring” the first-century church on earth. They scoff at the idea of studying the scriptures, identifying the church’s nature and character, and establishing it in every city throughout the world. They have given up on “restoring” the ancient order of things and are speaking of “updating” the church to meet twentieth century needs.

To them, talk about getting back to the first-century church and its practices is arrogant and they often arrogantly respond: “which one”—Corinth and its factional, immoral character; Ephesus and its departure from love and its first works; or Thessalonica and its controversial views of the second coming? Their rationale is that churches at the beginning had problems and practiced error and God accepted them. By this they rationalize error today and plead for the acceptance of all churches. And, of course, that’s where the premise of their plea leads.

The ultimate conclusion and foundation of their view is that no man can study the Bible and determine truth—therefore all men are doomed to accept error. What they ignore is that the teaching of what was later written in scripture was considered the standard of righteousness and these churches were all condemned and urged to correct these errors. And what they further ignore is that God not only condemned churches who practiced error, but He also threatened to remove the lampstand of any church that refused to repent (Revelation 2:5).

Jesus and the apostles again and again stressed the importance of truth: that the truth shall make man free; that one is sanctified by truth; that those who pervert truth will be accursed; that anyone who goes beyond truth is cut off from God; and that people who love not the truth and believe a lie will be condemned (John 8:31–32; 17:17; Galatians 1:6–9; 1 John 9; 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12). If Bible students cannot determine truth from error, then all are condemned to eternal damnation.

There is, for example, a way of worship that is in “spirit and truth” and there is a way of worship that is based on the doctrines of men and is vain (John 4:24 and Matthew 15:1–9). Since the word of God is truth and the scriptures are the basis of righteousness, one must as the Bereans search the scriptures daily to see what is true. Those that do will learn that brethren in the first century spoke to one another in hymns and spiritual songs, assembled on the first day of the week to observe the Lord’s Supper, gave into a treasury as they were prospered, continued steadfastly in prayer, and taught and edified one another by the teaching of God’s word (Ephesians 5:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 14:1–40; 16:1–2). Is there anyone who would affirm that any of these practices are not based on truth?

We learned these practices from the Scripture, and we can learn also from scripture what the “work” of the church is, how churches were “organized,” “how believers became members,” what “name” they exalted and honored, and what “purity” and “holiness” demanded of them.

What God taught and approved of in these matters is what we are devoted to and if we practice them we will be identified with the practices of the “one true church” that Jesus built through the work and preaching of the apostles. This we are committed to and invite all men to join us in these practices.