

BAPTISM: IDENTIFIED WITH JESUS FORVER

Theme: The Spirit's ministry of baptism identifies us forever with the Lord Jesus and His church.

We've been studying the Bible's teaching on the 'baptizing' ministry of the Holy Spirit. And we began by seeking to clarify what the Bible *does not* mean by "the baptism of the Holy Spirit". (See our last lesson titled "Baptized by The Spirit"—What Does That Mean?"). In today's lesson, we take up what the Bible *does* mean when it speaks of this ministry.

In contrast to the 'second-blessing' view of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that we considered in our last study, we will now be considering what we referred to earlier as 'the positional view'. We call it the 'positional view' because it has to do primarily with our spiritual position before God rather than our conscious experience. It is best understood as a non-experiential work of the Holy Spirit (that is, it is something that happens whether the believer is aware of it or not—although it would be true to say that many conscious 'experiences' flow from it). It is something that has been universally true of every individual believer in the history of the church since Pentecost. And it is something by which that individual believer is united—once and for all—to the saving work of Jesus Christ and to the church of all the redeemed. It's what Paul described when he wrote,

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4; emph. added).¹

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To understand this work more fully, let's first consider ...

I. THE MEANING OF 'BAPTISM' IN THIS IDENTIFYING WORK.

- A. The Greek word from which the name of this ministry of the Holy Spirit is derived—that is, the Greek word *baptizo*—has the normal meaning of "to wash" or "to dip". That's the sense of this word that we understand when we think of the ordinance of physical baptism in the local church, or even with the ceremonial washings that were part of the Jewish tradition—that is, as a "washing" or a "dipping" in water. But the word can also have the more figurative sense of an identifying, once-for-all-time event—something like an 'initiatory water-rite'¹. It suggests a singular event that forever changes a person's standing—an event which permanently 'identifies' that person with something, in some way, from that moment on. Just as a piece of cloth was permanently 'identified' with a pot of dye once it was dipped ("baptized") into it, so someone becomes permanently 'identified' with something else by that "baptism" experience.
- B. The New Testament gives us some striking examples of this figurative use of the word "baptism". Mark 10:38, for instance, tells us how Jesus' disciples had dared to ask Him for the high honor of sitting at His right hand and His left in His kingdom. He said to

them,

“You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38).

In saying this, our Lord was speaking of the experience of suffering that He was about to undergo for us through the betrayal and the cross. And because He told them later that they would indeed drink the cup that He drank, and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, He was letting them know that they would also suffer and be martyred for His name as His ambassadors in this world; but not in the way that He would suffer for them. But note, however, that this suffering was—both for Him and for them—an event that would be something that permanently 'mark' them and 'identify' them in some way. Another example of the same sort of use of 'baptism' is found in Luke 12:50, where Jesus speaks of His own betrayal unto death and the experience of the cross. There, He says,

“But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50).

That 'baptizing event', obviously, was the suffering of the cross. And note how it is being presented in these words as almost a 'before/after' kind of experience; something that, unless it happened and was completed, would leave things 'undone' and 'unaccomplished'—but something that, once done, will make things dramatically different 'afterward' than they were 'before'. Even the experience of the people of Israel in crossing the Red Sea was spoken of in this 'figurative' way. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2,

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 ...” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

The passing of the people of Israel through the Red Sea was an event that permanently identified them with the calling that God had given to Moses; and that forever marked them as God's people under Moses.

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So; that helps us to understand the range of meaning of this world 'baptism'. Now, with respect to the particular ministry of the Holy Spirit, let's consider what the Bible tells us about ...

II. THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS WORK.

A. It's important to remember that this “identifying” aspect of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not something that is meant to be seen as somehow 'distinct' and 'disconnected' from the event of Pentecost. Some Bible teachers, however, have suggested that the baptism of the Spirit *is* something that is to be seen as distinct from Pentecost; and they say this because in many English translations of the Bible, different prepositions (grammatical 'relationship' words) are used in connection with it.

1. The New Testament passages that refer to the event of Pentecost before it happened

(Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5) and the one passage that described it after it happened (Acts 11:15-16) are spoken of in English translations by the use of the phrase “with”; that is 'baptized *with* the Spirit'). This is often said to refer to a baptism “with” the Spirit unto “power” or unto “witness”; much as what we see at Pentecost. 1 Corinthians 12:13, however, is translated by use of the word “by; that is, “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”. And because of the use of the preposition “by” in 1 Corinthians 12:13, this is often said to be a distinct baptism—a baptism “by” the Spirit unto “union” or unto “life”.

2. But a distinction between these two types of prepositional phrases (“with” and “by”) shouldn’t be pressed too much; nor should they be made into the basis of a theological distinction of 'baptism' from the one that occurred at Pentecost. And this is because, in the original language, the same Greek preposition (that is, *en*) is used in all the above references. Instead of supporting a distinction of 'baptisms', this fact in the original language might be seen as supporting the idea that the “baptism” spoken of in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts is of the same type as is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:13—that is, a spiritual 'baptism' that is in vital connection with what happened at Pentecost; a spiritual 'baptism' in which each individual believer present at Pentecost, along with every believer afterward, becomes forever identified with Christ; and in which all believers are forever identified with the 'one' body of Christ (that is, the church).
- B. The New Testament affirms that there are two basic results of the Spirit’s ministry of spiritually 'baptizing' the believer; and it expresses them in these ways:
1. First, the individual believer is said to be “baptized *into* Christ”. This is spoken of in Galatians 3:26-27;

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27; *emph. Added*).*

Though the role of the Holy Spirit isn’t directly mentioned in this verse, it is nevertheless implied by the phrase “baptized into”; since that is not a work that any human being could ever do. Here, the believer is brought by the Holy Spirit into such complete unity with Jesus that he or she has—once and for all—“put on Christ”. All that is true of the experience of Jesus on their behalf is now made to forever be true of them; and this union with Christ stands as the basis of their salvation. As Paul asks;

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:3-7; *emph. added*).*

2. Second, all individual believers are said to be “baptized *into* one body”. Each

redeemed man or woman shares the same basic value in the sight of God; because after speaking of our being 'baptized into Christ' in Galatians 3:27, Paul went on to say in vv. 28-29, there are now no distinctions between us before God.

*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. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28-29; *emph. added*).*

But there is also a shared unity in the sight of God; because, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (in the passage about spiritual gifts),

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; *emph. added*).*

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In closing, let's marvel over how this 'baptizing' ministry of the Holy Spirit gives us the basis for the most complete unity in Christ that we can enjoy together. As Paul wrote,

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:1-6; *emph. added*).*

Praise God that it's not our job to ever try to "create" unity. Because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that unity is already ours; and our job is to endeavor to 'keep' or 'guard' the unity we have already been given.

¹All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

²Walter Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 165.