



E4. Understanding Baptism:

Part 1

Eph. 4.5 *“one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**”*

Heb. 6.1-2 *“¹Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of **the doctrine of baptisms**, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”*

“One baptism”—“Two Baptisms”? Baptism is a solemn ceremonial act and is one and the same for all, by which believers in Christ are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s Church, and which also is described as being baptized “into Christ,” a truly mystical encounter with God: Gal. 3.27 *“For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.”* What an interesting mind-stretching scripture this is; it must certainly stimulate our spiritual curiosity. In addition, it must be noted that baptism has two separate but equal elements to it: initially being baptized in water and subsequently being baptized in the Holy Spirit—one is outward dealing with sin and faith in Christ, and the other is inward dealing with the spontaneity of life itself.

Introduction

It is interesting to note that the word “baptism” appears 22 times in the New Testament. It is used as a verb, “baptize” 80 times, and “baptized” 61 times. However, the word appearing as “baptisms” occurs only once, as seen in our opening scripture of Heb. 6.2. regarding *“the doctrine of baptisms.”* Why is this so, and what significance, if any, does this plural form of the word baptism have?

Perhaps a clue to this understanding can be derived from the definition of the word “baptism,” (Greek *baptizo*) which properly means to *submerge* or *immerse*. Because the word can also imply a “cleansing,” it is also used in the customary cleansing of the Jews in the religious cleansing of themselves” (same word *baptizo*), and of certain *“washing of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels,”* in which the object is submerged in water for its cleansing. (Mk. 7.4, Heb. 9.10) But its most profound use is in Christianity as two formal acts, sometimes independently, sometimes both at once; 1) the physical baptism (immersion in water) and 2) the spiritual

baptism (being filled with, immersed into the Holy Spirit), thus alluding to the two “*baptisms*” noted above in Heb. 6.2.

Just as there is only one “communion” in Christ, yet during the breaking of bread and drinking of the cup one eats of His body, then drinks of His blood, each act having its own particular significance, so too there is only one baptism “into Christ” (Rm. 6.3, Gal. 3.27) yet there are the matters of “water” and “spirit.” Jesus spoke of this to Nicodemus in Jn. 3.5-6,

*“⁵Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of **water** and the **Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*

No one can actually *enter the Kingdom of God* except by God’s prescribed and ordained way. One may practice Christianity by embracing many of its practices and beliefs, yet he or she has only entered into the practice of a Christian religion and not into the reality of *entering the Kingdom of God* by being *baptized into Christ*. Being *baptized into Christ* is spiritual, meaning it is something above and beyond the bounds of religion, which is outward and formal. Jesus adamantly said, clearly and succinctly, “*unless one is born of **water** and the **Spirit** he ‘cannot’ enter the Kingdom of God.*” One “*cannot enter,*” meaning it is completely outside one’s own ability to enter the Kingdom of God except by God’s prescribed way of baptism.

Jesus insisted, “*unless one is born again*” _ thus regeneration must precede any further activity involving entering into, or functioning within, the Kingdom of God. And, being *born again* very often occurs with, and is in agreement with, and often concurrent with, baptism_ that is, true baptism, not just formal or ceremonial baptism but a baptism wherein the ability and power of God abides in the believer. However, it must be remembered that salvation is not dependent upon the act of baptism but by faith and the grace of God, as it is written, Eph. 2.8-10,

“⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

On the day of Pentecost, see Acts 2, Peter gave a powerful testimony concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; and it is written that those who heard his words were “*cut to the heart,*” and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (Acts 2.37) Peter’s reply is sufficient for all people, at all times, and in all places, Acts. 2.38,

“³⁸Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Two-fold Aspect of Baptism

Do you see here the two elements mentioned by Peter of baptism? The first element of baptism is to be baptized in the *name of Jesus Christ*, publically immersed in water, for the *remission of sins*; and the second element of baptism is to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit_ which is a spiritual immersion. The first involves the divine act of purification of one's corrupt nature before God; it means Divine "forgiveness" from the consequences and debt of sin. These consequences lead to death: both the physical death, as when the soul separates or departs from the body, and spiritual death which is the separation of spirit from the Spirit of God. Even as Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple had to be sanctified by a blood sacrifice before God's presence could come into the Most Holy Place of worship, so too man must be sanctified by the Blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ in order to become a suitable dwelling place of the Holy Spirit; which leads us to...

The second element of baptism, that is, *receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit*. This is the act of "**receiving by faith**" the Spirit of God; the emphasis here is on the word "*receive*", which really means, "to aggressively or actively accept what is being offered, it is the exercising of one's will in faith." Without acceptance and receiving what is offered remains in the hands of the One who is offering. All too often this critical aspect of baptism is overlooked at the time of water baptism where all focus is upon the ceremonial submergence in water. However, this is the point of spiritual newness, of union with God in Christ.

In addition, if water baptism is the point of initiation of the believer into the Church, then Holy Spirit baptism is initiation of the believer as a functioning member of the Body of Christ (see Eph. 1.22-23). In this fullness of baptism independence and isolation is lost forever; and public declaration that all other world religions and atheisms are flatly rejected and Jesus Christ is your Lord and giver of life and is the sole connection with God the Father; wherein all other belief systems are futile and fail miserably, whose end is destruction and isolation from God.

Baptism - a Frontal attack on Satan and his kingdom.

Baptism is also a point of entering into a warfare with the enemy of God, the devil, who is the god of this world. (2 Cor. 4.4) Americans just celebrated "Independence Day," on the Fourth of July. This is in remembrance of our Founding Fathers in 1776 signing the "Declaration of Independence," a document declaring sovereignty of the then thirteen colonies and their independence from British rule. Each man signing this "Declaration" document knew that their signature on that document meant a declaration of war with Britain who was the dominant world power at the time and certain execution if they were ever apprehended by them. It led to the birth of a new nation, the United States of America.

So too baptism is the greatest threat and act of rebellion to Satan and his kingdom of darkness which, until the coming of Christ, was the greatest power and influence in the entire

world. Consider the magnitude and extent of Satan's kingdom. He operates in and through all the worldly systems of governments, corporations, education and mass media; he manipulates philosophies and ideologies to his way of thinking; he fosters counterfeit and fake spiritual experiences; and continually instigates controversy and division, warfare and strife. His kingdom is associated with darkness, sin, lawlessness, and rebellion against God's authority. He blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the Gospel of Christ, keeping them in bondage to sin, doubt, confusion, and death.

Baptism is a frontal attack on Satan and his dark kingdom and an act of engagement of spiritual warfare. It is a declaration of independence from Satan and his power and authority on the one hand, and allegiance to the sovereignty of the Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus as Lord on the other hand. Every soul truly baptized in "water and spirit" becomes the enemy of Satan and is given to the destruction and collapse of his evil kingdom. One baptized only in water poses no threat to Satan, for he is without spiritual power to render harm to his kingdom. However, to the one having been immersed in the Holy Spirit is being equipped to do warfare with the devil. It is as Paul prayed for the brethren at Ephesus, Eph. 3.16,

"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,"

What does that mean to you..." *to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man*"? Does it conjure up the thoughts, as it may well should, that where the Spirit dwells there Christ dwells...in the inner most core of your being, the "*inner man*" and that His resident power affects a change in us intellectually, emotionally, and morally; these are vital aspects of our spiritual nature.

And again in 2 Cor. 10.4-6, "4*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5*casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6*and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

For the pulling down of strongholds. Do you realize how long Satan and his dominions have been working continually, since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden, to build his strongholds, his spiritual fortresses in the earth? How he has infiltrated governments, kingdoms, societies, cultures, nations and tribes. How he has manipulated and blinded politicians of all sorts, great "thinkers," the holders of the world's great wealth's, business executives, teachers, and the average family man and woman. And so, from the great to the least, the strongest to the weakest, his devious strongholds are being built into the lives of each and every soul upon this planet. These are well-walled fortresses, designed to keep out the Kingdom of God, and to protect the harboring of sin, unbelief, pride, and the hardness of heart; promoting everything both spiritual and natural "*that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.*"

We see these strongholds in senseless wars being fought over power and greed; with the spreading and enforcement of diabolical false gods, spiritisms, and false religions; with

deteriorating societies filled with crimes, drugs, and all kinds of sexual deviations and promiscuities; with the decline of Christianity in Europe and North America and the turning of former churches into factories, warehouses, and mosques. These diabolical strongholds are seen in the perversion and weakening of educational systems where “social engineering” attempts to exploit human psychology and displace sound traditional education with all kinds of indoctrinations, social programs and “touchy feely” emotional experiences. These strongholds are seen in the significant increase in the demand for psychological counseling being driven from the growing awareness of mental health needs, and in the increase in suicide rates, in failure in marriages and skyrocketing divorce rates, and with the breakdown of families and family relationships.

None of these strongholds will exist for long in the true church, nor can they. Neither can the devil’s strongholds stand in the lives of true born again baptized believers. In these lives the Kingdom of God has entered bringing light and life to their souls. Satan would disrupt the whole of baptism, true spirit driven baptism, to keep the potential believer powerless and without strength and understanding...being naïve or simple-minded. He would convince the Church of the “ritual” of baptism, making it a religious ceremony but denying its power to the pulling down of sin and dark strongholds in people’s lives; 2 Tim. 3.5 reads, *“having a form of godliness but denying its power.”* He would stress to keep baptism “symbolic” of spiritual things, of pretending or acting to die to sin so that one may gain heaven. In this way the neophyte poses no threat to him or his kingdom.

Embracing the Power of Baptisms

Following is an “encyclopedic” definition of baptism. It contains much truth, but all its truth is nullified by one word, “**symbolic**”:

“Baptism is a Christian sacrament that is a **symbolic** ritual that represents a believer’s identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It signifies a believer’s old life being **symbolically** buried with Christ and a new life emerging, a new beginning as a follower of Jesus. It is an outward expression of an inward commitment to faith and a public declaration of one’s decision to follow Jesus.”

Many will argue that this definition is correct, that their baptism was just symbolic of their faith in Christ and there is no actual spiritual power imparted involved in the act. They note that, once again, one is not saved through baptism but by faith and the grace of God. (Eph. 2.8) Many will say that baptism is a ceremony that symbolizes God’s forgiveness and a believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection and his acceptance as a member of the church. However, I am convinced that baptism is more than a symbolic gesture of an inward work of grace; and that some spiritual presence and power enters into the believer’s life that was not present before. Allow me to explain more fully, firstly by example...

An example of marriage. A couple may live together and not be married. They may practice a formal marriage ceremony and not yet be married. They may even exchange rings as symbolic gestures of oneness and not be married. But at that moment when the couple stand before God, with the witness of the whole church, and each one says those binding words, “I do,” then all things change because a covenant is made before God, and now, as it is written that, *“they are no longer two but one flesh,”*

Gn. 2.24 *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and **they shall become one flesh.**”*

Mt. 19.4-6, *“**4**And He (Jesus) answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ **5**and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? **6**So then, they are **no longer two but one flesh.** Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.’”*

What does this mean, *“...and the two shall become one flesh”*? This question is argued among all sorts of Bible scholars and theologians. In reality, it doesn't matter what they “think” it might mean, or what opinion others may have; for the answer resides in the power of God who spoke it into existence. **Once the word of God is spoken into existence, power abides in that word, as it is written Is. 55.11,**

“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

If received as the word of God, there resides power in His word, *“the two shall be one flesh.”* For instance, I can say this with all certainty, that if any couple receives this statement as the “word of God,” *“...and the two shall become one flesh,”* and seek to explain its meaning in their marriage, whether they search the scriptures, the doctrine of denominations, current books and teachings, or even if they just sit together and attempt to use all their own Bible knowledge, logic and reasoning, the power of God will be released into that marriage and a new kind of oneness will be formed in their relationship. Its revelation will *“effectively work in you,”* forever changing your understanding of marriage and spousal relationship.

Married people, try it. Sit across from your spouse, with the Bible and whatever reference resources you may have, and with a pencil and paper in your hand, begin listing the ways that it is ***“no longer two of you but now one flesh.”*** Even Google on your smartphone, explain ‘no longer two but one flesh.’” Use whatever resource available, including your common sense. The wedding ring will no longer be a simple “symbol” of unity, but it will be representative and a reminder of oneness in the eyes of God. An inherent power will begin to work in your marriage towards completeness of that oneness. Of course, unbelief and doubt nullify all such working of the Spirit as one continues to eat only from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, to satisfy their own flesh.

Marriage is not a simple physical union, contract, a mutual agreement, a 50/50 proposition. It is a holy institution of God to function and work by divine principles_ and certainly not without God's intervening power whereby a deep relational bond between a man and woman becomes a new, unified oneness. This unity reflects God's original design for marriage, a life that emphasizes a mutual godly love for one another, self-sacrifice, and a shared life together. This marriage is to be reflective of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

Next time, in Understanding Baptism: Part 2, we will begin by exploring the spiritual similarity between the "*one flesh*" of marriage and being "*in Christ*" in baptism.