



WHAT IS **TRUE** BAPTISM

THE LIVING TRUTH FELLOWSHIP



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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

When you read the title of this booklet and saw the word “baptism,” did you immediately think about *water*? If so, your response is like that of the vast majority of people with whom I have discussed this subject. It is also what I myself believed for many years of my Christian life. But the question I eventually came to ask was why the word “baptize,” which actually means “to dip” or “to immerse,” has become almost solely associated with water, when, biblically speaking, there are other “liquid” alternatives to be considered?

Discovering the answer to that question will help us solve a three-pronged problem that has for centuries caused great division among dedicated and well-meaning Christians. It will also show us what is the “one baptism” prescribed for the Church, as per Ephesians 4:5. Here is the first part of the problem: Most Christians have been taught, and thus believe, that the ritual of baptism in or with water is relevant for them today. Beliefs about the importance of water baptism range from an optional, but highly recommended, symbolic significance, all the way to an absolute necessity for salvation. This booklet will show from Scripture that this is not the case.

The fact that most Christians throughout the centuries have equated baptism with water is very understandable. As we will see, water baptism was prescribed under the Mosaic Law. Jesus himself was baptized, and many early Christians practiced water baptism during the first years of the Church. But do the *Church Epistles*, that section of Scripture specifically addressed to believers living in the Church Administration, which began on the Day of Pentecost and will end with the “Rapture,” call for this practice? That is one question we will answer in this booklet.¹

1. The “Church Epistles” are Paul’s letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. They contain the majority of the “all truth” of which Jesus spoke prophetically in John 16:13, that is, all the truth that we as Christians today need to know in order to live as God wants us to live. Properly understanding what are referred to in the Bible as “administrations,” that is, distinguishing between the different ways that God dealt with people through the ages, is *the key* to understanding baptism. Scripture tells us that throughout the history of mankind, there have been only three groups of people (Jews, Gentiles, or the Church of God [i.e., Christians]—1 Cor. 10:32 - KJV). If we do not understand which parts of Scripture are written specifically for which of these groups, the Bible will contradict itself. For an overview of this critical subject, we refer you

The second part of the problem is caused by the first: Christians cannot agree upon, and have even literally warred over, the issues related to water baptism, such as: the meaning of baptism; whether or not baptism actually brings about forgiveness of one's sins by God; the qualifications and age of those to be baptized; who can administer baptism; the method of baptism (dipping, dunking, or sprinkling); formulas in the baptismal procedure; and pre-baptismal instruction. Through the centuries, disagreements about these issues have often been so intense and violent that the world has wondered how people who are supposedly commanded by God to love one another could be so violently opposed to one another's interpretations of Scripture. In modern times, the controversy has been toned down, but there are still denominations teaching not only that their particular understanding of baptism is the right one, but also that adherence to it is a requirement for salvation, or at least membership in their church.

The third, and most practical, part of the problem is that those who argue for water baptism in any form are arguing for something far less than the awesome spiritual reality of holy spirit baptism for which Jesus Christ lived and died to make available to all people today. It is as if they are striving to relate to the shadow of a person rather than to the person himself. In this booklet, we will see that arguments about water baptism could have been avoided altogether, because we will show from Scripture that for Christians, baptism is not actually about water, but something much deeper and far more practically beneficial.²

The old, ceremonial, outer washing in water prescribed in the Mosaic Law for Israel pointed toward, and has now been superseded by, the new, actual, inner cleansing in holy spirit (the divine nature of God). The old water baptism could not, and still cannot, change the heart of a man, but the spirit of the Holy God can revolutionize a person from the inside out and enable him to be like Jesus Christ, his true Baptizer. Baptism in water was one of the Old Testament "shadows" cast by the approaching light of Christ. Bringing into reality that greater cleansing, which water baptism only symbolized, required Jesus' sinless life, sacrificial death, resurrection,

to our audio teachings, *The Purpose of the Ages* (May/June 97) and *Shining Like Stars In The Universe* (An entertaining overview of the Administrations) (Dec 02).

2. Biblically, a "Christian" is one who has confessed Jesus Christ as his Lord and believed that God raised him from the dead, as per Romans 10:9. The person is then saved by being **born again of incorruptible seed** (1 Pet. 1:23 - KJV) and is part of the Church of the Body of Christ that began on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2.

ascension, and pouring out of the gift of holy spirit. The Good News is that *he did it all—for you and me!*

Not having been taught this great truth has relegated too many Christians to living in the aforementioned shadow rather than stepping into the light of Christ's accomplishment on their behalf. My goal in this booklet is to enlighten such dear saints in the hope that they will appropriate unto themselves all the treasures contained in the gift of holy spirit that Jesus died to make available to each and every believer. Jesus said that knowing the truth makes one free, which conversely means that any erroneous teaching or misunderstanding of the Bible, when believed and practiced, leads to a diminished quality of one's life. This holds true for the subject of baptism. Millions of precious Christians have gone to their graves (some no doubt worn out by arguing about baptism) without ever even hearing the truth of God's Word regarding what each and every Christian is endowed with at the moment of his New Birth.

It is important to acknowledge the power of ritual and ceremony in people's lives, because this is a key element in the practice of water baptism. In the Old Testament, God-prescribed rituals played a big role in the lives of Jewish people as a way of worshipping God, and for good reason. Old Testament believers did not have the spirit of God within them, and thus were living from the "outside in," so to speak. Because of that, God mandated ceremonial rituals in order to help them stay focused on Him. Many people today are drawn to religious rituals because it is something in the senses realm that they can do and know that they did it according to a prescribed standard. This gives them a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Regarding water baptism, however, the question is who prescribed it for whom?

With the coming of the gift of holy spirit and the corresponding start of the Christian Church in Acts 2, each and every believer was equipped with the divine nature of God. By internalizing the standard of God's Word, each Christian from then on can live from the "inside out" as the spirit of God energizes his renewed mind. Because both water baptism and circumcision were part of the Mosaic Law, we will see the parallel between them that God draws in order to show us that neither avails the Christian of anything more than what he received from God at the moment of his New Birth. Baptism in water is not prohibited by God today, and it has been very significant for many who have viewed it as a public declaration of their commitment to Christ. I understand that, but it simply is not

necessary, and its practice opens up the possibility of needless division in the Body of Christ.

Water baptism is one of the oldest and most cherished Christian traditions, and my challenging its relevance to believers today may seem to you akin to jeopardizing a family heirloom. If you are a Christian of orthodox persuasion and an advocate of the practice of water baptism, please hear my heart. I completely understand why you believe as you do, because I once believed the same thing. I ask only that you consider what I set forth herein from Scripture, which is the only valid standard for separating truth from error. You may find that what I set before you is true, and therefore more spiritually invigorating and liberating than the position you now hold, and that it also opens up greater possibilities for more powerful Christian living.

Chapter 1

Two Baptisms: Which Is Which?

There is a most pertinent biblical record that clearly delineates between the old water baptism that most Christians think about and practice, and the new holy spirit baptism that God speaks of and elaborates upon in the Church Epistles.¹

Acts 18:24–28

(24) Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

(25) He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, **though he knew only the baptism of John** [the baptism in water unto repentance].

(26) He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and **explained to him the way of God more adequately** [i.e., that “the way of God” was no longer the “baptism of John”].

(27) When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

(28) For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

1. In the original, God-breathed Scriptures, there was no delineation between capital letters and small letters. That means that every capital letter was added by a translator. In English, the meaning of some words is not changed by capitalizing them, such as “dog,” but other words are radically changed, such as “mark.” It goes from being a spot on the wall to being a person named “**Mark**.” So it is with the words “holy spirit” in the Bible. The “Holy Spirit” is one of many names or titles for God, the Father of Jesus Christ and the Creator of all things, the only true God. But “holy spirit” is the gift of God’s divine nature and power that every person receives at the moment of his New Birth. Only the context determines whether or not “holy spirit” should be capitalized, and the majority of Bible translators have failed to properly make the distinction between the Giver (God) and the gift (His nature). This has caused no end of confusion among Christians. For a thorough exposition of this subject, see our book, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to Be Like Christ*.

I have **bolded** a couple of key phrases to show why the above verses are so important in regard to the record that immediately follows them in Acts 19. Apollos knew *only* the baptism of John. Does that not imply that there was something more, like maybe a *greater* baptism? What did Priscilla and Aquila share with Apollos when they “...explained to him the way of God more adequately”? Could it have been the knowledge of that greater baptism?

Acts 19:1-6

(1) While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus [**where Apollos had just been teaching “only the baptism” of John**]. There he found some disciples

(2) and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit].”²

(3) So Paul asked them, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied.

(4) Paul said, “John’s baptism [into water] **was** [note the past tense] a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

(5) On hearing this, they were baptized **into the name of the Lord Jesus**.

(6) When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

In Acts 18, we see that it was Paul who had taught Priscilla and Aquila what they in turn taught Apollos—that because of what Jesus Christ accomplished, there is a greater and more powerful baptism available than the old water baptism John the Baptist had preached. In fact, as Paul states in the above verses, and as we will see in Scripture later on, it was John himself who said that water baptism was only a symbolic foreshadowing of the greater holy spirit baptism that Jesus would implement.

2. “The Holy Spirit” should be rendered “holy spirit,” because there is no article “the” in the Greek text, and it is referring to the *gift* from God, His divine nature that Jesus Christ deposits into the heart of each person at the moment of his New Birth. The “Holy Spirit” refers to God Himself, the *Giver*.

In Acts 19:1ff (above), when Paul met the Ephesian disciples, he wanted to confirm that they had been born again and had thus received the gift of holy spirit, so he asked them about it. They said, “Huh?” It is possible that Paul may then have elaborated about the finished work of Jesus Christ that he later set forth in the Church Epistles. In any case, when they heard what Paul taught them, it says that they were “...baptized **into the name of the Lord Jesus.**” The word “into” is an excellent translation that some other versions (including the King James Version) do not have. Does it say that they were baptized into *water*? No. The element into which they were “immersed” was *the name of Jesus Christ.*³

Having heard “...only the baptism of John” from Apollos, they were not yet born again. When Paul explained to them more about what Jesus Christ had made available, they believed, and at the moment of their New Birth, were saturated with all that the name of Jesus Christ represents. Unfortunately, because of what they have been taught, *water* is what most Christians think about when they read this record. Why? That’s what we want to find out, so let us see what the Word of God says about this matter.

3. In the culture and custom of biblical times, one’s “name” represented all the power and resources behind it. This is similar to our modern times when a policeman says, “Stop in the name of the law.” He is backed up by all the power and authority of that local government.

Chapter 2

Water and the Holy Spirit

Throughout the Word of God, water is a symbol, a “type,” of the spirit of God, and is often used analogously to represent holy spirit, that is, the divine nature and power of God. In Scripture, God is also known as “the Holy Spirit.”¹ In Jeremiah 2:13, for example, God refers to Himself as a “spring of living water” (see also Isa. 44:3 and 4). Think about water and what it means to you. Water is essential to life—we die without it. The average person can go about 60 days without food before he starves to death, but one can go only about three days without water, because it is so vital. In fact, the human body is mostly water—about 55-65% (the rest may be hot air). Whenever someone forsakes God, the spring of living water, he has no choice but to do what Jeremiah 2:13 says, to hew out his own broken cistern, which is always one that simply won’t “hold water.” We see that just as actual water gives life physically and is integral to one’s physical life, so spiritual water (the gift of holy spirit) gives life spiritually.

Consider this same parallel between water and the spirit of God in the following verses, where Jesus is speaking to a woman he met at a local well:

John 4:13 and 14

(13) Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,

(14) but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

In John 6, we find another pertinent record illustrating the analogous relationship between water and the holy spirit. I have taken a bit of literary license in summarizing verses 1–34: Jesus had been invited to a company picnic, only to discover that all 5,000 employees had forgotten their lunches. So he put up a big banner that read, “FREE FOOD – ALL YOU CAN EAT!” He then fed them delicious fish sandwiches. Later, when they got hungry again, they followed him to the other side of the lake for more free food. So Jesus, as his manner was, then began to teach them

1. Walter L. Wilson, *A Dictionary of Bible Types*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody, MA, 1999, p. 452).

an abstract, spiritual truth that he figuratively connected to the concrete, physical acts of eating and drinking. John 6:35 is a key verse in the record, and it reads: “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’” Clearly, he is equating eating and drinking with believing his words. That kind of figurative language is still used today when we say that someone is “eating up” what another is saying, or “drinking in” the words of a speaker.

Like his Father, Jesus is also a fountain of living waters, and he stated just that in the next chapter of John.

John 7:37-39 (ESV)

(37) On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

(38) Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

(39) Now this he said about the Spirit [read, spirit], whom [which] those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit [read, spirit] had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Did Jesus stand up and *mutter*? No, he wanted everyone to hear his earthshaking pronouncement, so he shouted over the din of the merry revelers: “Yo! Excuse me! I am the eternal drinking fountain. If you’re thirsty, come to me and drink, by believing in me.” That is exactly the point he made in John 6 when he equated drinking with *believing his words*. In John 7, he proved it by referring to the Old Testament, of which he himself is the subject. The promised Messiah was the one who God, the eternal fountain, the spring of living water, sent to give drink to a dying world. And what is that “liquid” refreshment? As verse 39 emphasizes, it is the holy spirit of God, again analogously referred to as water.

The holy spirit would be given to all who believe in Jesus as Lord, but Jesus could not do this “pouring out” until after he was glorified, that is, raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God. At his exaltation, Jesus was given the holy spirit of God “without measure” (John 3:34-NASB) so that he could give it to others who believed in him. For the Church, Jesus first “poured out” the holy spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. In this classic verse, Peter is speaking to the amazed crowd assembled in the Temple on that historic day, and it is most significant that he also compares the gift of holy spirit to liquid:

Acts 2:33

Exalted to the right hand of God, he [Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit [holy spirit] and has poured out [like water] what you now see and hear.

When John the Baptist came as a forerunner to the Messiah, many people asked him if *he* were the Christ. Look closely at his reply:

Luke 3:16

John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. **But** [in contrast] one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] and with fire.

While John was baptizing people in the river Jordan, Jesus himself showed up, and John baptized him. Why was Jesus baptized in water? Because he was a Jew living under the Mosaic Law, and water baptism was still pertinent to him. As Jesus said in Matthew 3:15 when John was humbly reluctant to baptize him, “...Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness...” That is, all of God’s requirements for the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus, who by his baptism symbolically identified with all men’s sin and need for cleansing, and became our substitute.²

It is also significant that at the same moment when John baptized Jesus with water, God “baptized” His Son with holy spirit in the form of a dove that descended upon him. Thus, in Jesus Christ, both baptisms interfaced, showing the transition between the old and the new that would take effect on the Day of Pentecost when the Church began. Accompanied by God’s no doubt “reverb-ial” voice from heaven affirming Jesus’ identity and His love for His Son, this event marked the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Many believe that John the Baptist was the first to baptize in water, but this is clearly not the case. If so, John would have been pretty lonely standing in the Jordan River waiting on the Israelites to come and be baptized. If the Israelites had not already known about water baptism, they would have walked away after hearing him preach and said, “What the heck was that John guy talking about, anyway? I know what ‘repent’ means, but what is this ‘baptism’ stuff?” No, as Jews, they were very familiar with water baptism, and that is why they flocked to the river. That is also why,

2. NIV Study Bible, note on Matthew 3:15.

when the priests and Levites questioned John, they did not act surprised, as if baptism were a new ritual.

Hebrews 9:10 mentions “various ceremonial washings” in the Law, and the Greek word for “washings” there is “*baptismos*.” God could have easily used one of several other Greek words, such as *pluno*, which is used of washing inanimate things; *nipto*, used of washing a part of the body; or *louo*, which means “to bathe” or “to wash the entire body.” Instead, He chose “*baptismos*” [baptisms] to refer to the Old Testament washings.

A careful reading of the Old Testament reveals various types of washings for both Israelites and proselytes to Judaism. Exodus 30:17-21 mentions the bronze basin that was placed between the door of the Tabernacle and the altar so the priests could wash their hands and feet, thus ceremonially purifying themselves so they would not die in the presence of God. Water baptism under the Law was also representative of the one baptized going down into the grave and then being re-born unto life.

According to Exodus 40:12, Aaron and his sons were brought to the Tabernacle and washed with water. When Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, he had a basin cast of bronze that was so large the Bible calls it “the Sea.” Scholars estimate that it held about 12,000 gallons of water and was a source of water for bathing, which was sometimes done by pouring the water over the man, and sometimes by putting it in a different container (2 Chron. 4:6).

The Mosaic Law was full of regulations about washing. There were many different things that a person could do that would make him unclean, and often the Law said that he then had to wash in water in order to re-enter the congregation. Compare Leviticus 14:9, 15:7, 8, 11, 13, 21, 22 and 27, 16:26 and 28, and note the following similar verses:

Leviticus 17:15 and 16

(15) “Anyone, whether native-born or alien, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be ceremonially unclean till evening; then he will be clean.

(16) But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible.”

In the sense of getting rid of uncleanness, bathing in water, besides being a sanitary regulation, had some typological significance. The same was true of John’s baptism – the water was symbolic of the rinsing off of sin

and of showing one's desire to enter the Kingdom of God. Also, the Levites were sprinkled with water before they started ministering in the Tabernacle (Num. 8:6 and 7). The Law even had a special water of purification that was used in certain cases of uncleanness (e.g., Num. 19).

By the time of John the Baptist, there were ritual washing pools all over Israel. Today many of these pools can be seen in the archeological excavations throughout Israel, with good examples at Qumran, New Testament Jericho, and Jerusalem itself. It is believed that the Jews of the time of Christ required a new convert to be water baptized. Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible* says,

A stranger who desired to become a Proselyte of the Covenant, or of Righteousness, i.e., in the fullest sense an Israelite, must be circumcised and baptized, and then offer a sacrifice.

It goes on to say that the person was taken:

to a pool, in which he stood up to his neck in water, while the great commandments of the Law were recited to him. These he promised to keep. Then a benediction was pronounced and he plunged beneath the water, taking care to be entirely submerged.³

Here is another telling quote regarding the prominence of ritual washings in Judaism:

Ritual immersion was important enough to the Jews that the Mishnah, which is the first section of the Talmud and collected from early oral interpretations of the Scripture, devotes an entire tractate to mikva'ot [the plural of mikveh], which were ritual immersion pools. Among other things, it describes how much water a mikveh should contain, how to stop a leak, and even places the "living water" that the mikveh contained into six grades of excellence or acceptability. The water in the mikveh was to come "by the hand of heaven" and not "by the hand of man," so it had to be rainwater (gravity fed from rooftops was fine), springs, etc. Drawing water from cisterns to fill the mikveh was not acceptable, but in an interesting twist, since the Rabbis declared that mikveh water had the power to purify, small amounts of cistern water could be added to the "living water" to keep the mikveh full, and it was declared purified by the water already in the mikveh. The

3. *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1898, reprinted in 1988), James Hastings, "Baptism," Vol. 1, p. 239.

beauty of baptizing, as John did, in the Jordan River, was that there would never be any disputes about whether or not the water was Levitically acceptable.⁴

4. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 2002, "They Are Ritual Baths," Ronny Reich, pp. 50–55.

Chapter 3

God's Goal: An Internal Cleansing

Hebrews 10:1

The law is only a **shadow** of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

All of the ritual and ceremonial washings of the Old Testament were symbolic in nature and were a precursor to the greater reality of the inner cleansing by the Messiah's work and baptism in holy spirit. In God's "economy," they were done away with when the greater baptism that He had in mind finally came to pass on the Day of Pentecost, and the Church began. Interestingly, it *was* John the Baptist who introduced the idea of **baptize with holy spirit** (Matt. 3:11). The Greek word *baptizo* means "to immerse" or "to dip." The liquid connotation of **baptizing in holy spirit** must be figurative, because holy spirit is intangible, and cannot literally be poured out, nor can one literally be immersed in it.

John's water baptism was called "...a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4b). That is, his baptism symbolized, and was accompanied by, repentance, a commitment to turn away from sin, on the part of the one baptized. We should not miss the *significant* difference between this and the baptism in holy spirit that is synonymous with the New Birth. Romans 10:9 is the simplest declaration of how anyone can be born again and thus become a Christian:

Romans 10:9

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

There is no mention of one having to turn away from his sins in order to get born again of God's spirit. Rather, when one turns to Jesus as Lord, all his prior sins are forgiven and he is *forever* given righteousness in God's sight. That is how much bigger the internal baptism is than the external one.

In light of the old baptism pointing to the new, consider these verses:

Hebrews 7:18 and 19

(18) The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless
 (19) (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

How was the Mosaic Law “weak and useless”? Only in the sense that it could not “cleansed the conscience” even of one who adhered to it. In regard to their outward behavior of keeping the commandments, the Pharisees looked good. They appeared to be very righteous, but their hearts were far from God. They were not cleansed inwardly, and that is why Jesus likened them to “whitewashed tombs.” Remember that the Law was given “...so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Rom. 7:13c). It was to make people realize their need for a Savior from the sin that dwells within them (Rom. 7:18) and point them to the coming Messiah. Hebrews 9:6-8 talks about the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies once a year with a blood sacrifice for the sins of the people and himself, and that this pointed to a greater High Priest and a greater Holy Place. Then come these *monumentally significant* verses:

Hebrews 9:9 and 10

(9) This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and the sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the **conscience** of the worshipper.

(10) They are only a matter of food and drink and various **ceremonial washings** [*baptismos*]**—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.**

Remember that the word “baptism” means “to dip” or “to immerse” and does not in any way indicate the substance or element into which something is immersed. In reality, the word “baptism” is not a translation but a transliteration into English of the Greek words *baptismos* (noun) and *baptizo* (verb). **Look again at verse 10 above.** It clearly says that the “external regulations” like water baptism applied only until the time of a new order.

Here is where an understanding of the “administrations” in Scripture is indispensable to grasping the two-fold significance of the above verses. Hebrews 9:1 sets the context of the contrast between the Old Covenant with Israel and the New Covenant, which, logically and biblically, is also with *Israel, not the Church*, as many Christians today teach.

The epistle to the Hebrews was written primarily to former Jews who had been born again. In context, the “time of the new order” refers to the future institution of the New Covenant with Israel when Jesus Christ will return to Israel, raise all Old Covenant believers from the dead, set up his Millennial Kingdom headquartered in the “Promised Land,” and thereby confirm God’s “promises to the patriarchs” (Rom. 15:8).

Today, we Christians, looking back at what actually transpired on the Day of Pentecost when God injected a now-2000-year “parenthesis” into His-story, can understand that it is we who have the “firstfruits of the spirit” (Rom. 8:23). In the “earthen vessels” of our frail physical bodies, we now partake of the “holy spirit” aspect of the future New Covenant, when the holy spirit Christ has now given us will then animate the resurrected bodies of Old covenant believers.

So, practically speaking, a “new order” began when Jesus Christ made available an *internal cleansing* by his virgin birth, sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We now have within us the gift of holy spirit as the “divine nature” we can manifest by choosing to subjugate our old nature and become like Christ.

But the “new order” in view in Hebrews 9 will not come to pass until after the Rapture of the Church and the Tribulation of Israel when Jesus Christ comes back to earth as King. Then what is stated in the following verses will come to pass:

Jeremiah 31:31–34

(31) “The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

(32) It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

(33) “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

(34) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Hebrews 9:11–13 talks about Christ as the high priest entering once and for all into the heavenly “Holy of Holies” by his own blood. Then comes this fabulous verse:

Hebrews 9:14

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our **consciences** from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Why do we want to have a cleansed conscience? Why do we want the possibility of this *internal cleansing*? So that we may serve the living God. Amen. There is more in God’s Word confirming that water baptism was a symbolic forerunner to a greater reality. 1 Peter 3:18–20a talks about Christ’s death, his resurrection, and his subsequent declaration of that victory over death to the evil spirits who had corrupted mankind in the days of Noah and who had therefore been incarcerated. Then we read:

1 Peter 3:20 and 21

(20) who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

(21) and this water **symbolizes baptism** [an immersion] **that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body** [i.e., *not water baptism*] but the pledge of a good **conscience** toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Note carefully that the Word of God very specifically says that the baptism that **now** saves you is **not** water baptism; rather, it is something that touches you on the inside, and gives you the power to educate your conscience according to the Word of God. This was made possible by the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord that made him the Baptizer with holy spirit. It is interesting that the water of Noah’s flood did two things: it destroyed all the wicked people *and* it saved all the good people. So, our immersion into Christ via holy spirit both “killed” the old man, figuratively speaking, and gave us new life.

Chapter 4

Choose Your Baptism

After his resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus appeared to “the eleven” on a number of occasions and instructed them about many things. Mark 16 records one such occasion, and Jesus’ words there are one reason why many Christians believe that water baptism is still applicable today:

Mark 16:15 and 16

(15) He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

(16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

It is usually assumed that Jesus was saying that one who believes should be baptized in water, but because he did not specifically say “water,” perhaps we should not be so quick to jump into such an aquatic conclusion.

The book of Acts begins with Jesus talking to his disciples during this same period of time, just before his ascension, and reiterating to them some things about which he had instructed them just prior to his death. He had told them about a new spiritual program, the coming “new order,” so to speak, wherein the spirit of God (John 14:16 and 17) would be personally present with each of them. As Jews, they were expecting this to be associated with the coming of the Millennial Kingdom. Let’s see if what Jesus said about baptism in Acts 1 helps us understand what he meant about it in Mark 16. The following two verses could not be any plainer:

Acts 1:4 and 5 (ESV)

(4) And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me [see Luke 24:49];

(5) for John baptized with water, **but** [in contrast] you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] not many days from now.”¹

1. There are about 50 places in Acts and the Epistles where there is no article “the” used before the words “holy spirit.” In nearly every such instance, the “holy spirit” referred to is the gift, not the Giver.

How many baptisms did Jesus mention in Acts 1:5? Two. One is the old and one is the new. One is water and one is holy spirit. From what Jesus said, it doesn't appear that these two baptisms are a "both/and" option. Looks like "either/or," don't you think? So the question is *which one is applicable to Christians?* One of the following verses, which set off seven key doctrinal subjects about which the proper understanding is vital to Christian unity, leaves no doubt as to the answer.

Ephesians 4:4-6

(4) There is one body and one Spirit [spirit]—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—

(5) one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**;

(6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

If there is only **one baptism** applicable for the Church today, would it be the water baptism of John or the baptism with holy spirit? Surely the *one baptism* of Ephesians 4:5 is baptism in the *one spirit* by the *one Lord*, which comes by the *one faith* and makes a person part of the *one Body* of which God is the *one Father*, and which gives him the *one hope*.

If the *one baptism* for the Christian were water, why did God specifically make the point that Apollos knew *only* the baptism of John (Acts 18:25)? And why, when Paul met with Apollos' disciples, was he unsatisfied with water baptism and taught them to be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ? Given the choice between the two baptisms, water and holy spirit, is it not clear that the one baptism for the Christian Church is not the *water* that was used through the Old Testament, but *holy spirit* that came when the Church started?

Colossians is a companion epistle to Ephesians in that it corrects the believer's failure to maintain the doctrine presented in Ephesians.² In fact, much of Ephesians is reiterated in Colossians. The "one baptism" in holy spirit, which occurs the split second a person is born again of the spirit of God, is mentioned again in Colossians, where it is paralleled to circumcision in such a way so as to make clear that the figurative, inner baptism is the true baptism for Christians. The context is what each believer has "in Christ."

2. For a complete look at the relationship among the Church Epistles, see E. W. Bullinger, *The Church Epistles*. (Eyre and Spottiswoode, England, 1906).

Colossians 2:11 and 12

(11) In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with the circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,

(12) having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

It is plain from verse 11 that the “circumcision” done to each Christian by Jesus Christ is not a literal circumcision, as it was with Israel in the Old Testament under the Mosaic Law. No, it is a circumcision of the heart, a figurative circumcision that “cuts off” the absolute dominance of the fleshly, sinful nature. Verse 12 then sets forth the correspondingly figurative baptism, which parallels the Old Testament *immersion into and coming up out of water* with the Christian’s *burial and resurrection in Christ*. Like a Christian’s “circumcision” by Jesus Christ, so his “baptism” by the Lord at the moment of his New Birth is not a physical one, but rather an “inside job” that gives him the power to overcome his sinful nature and be like our Savior.

In the same vein, consider the following verse, which in its context also shows that because of what each Christian has received in his New Birth, he is no longer at the mercy of sin:

1 Corinthians 6:11

And that is what some of you were [sinners, as per verses 9 and 10]. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit [spirit] of our God.

The old water baptism was only a type and indicator of the greater baptism of holy spirit that was to come, the *one* baptism for the Church. In the above verse, “washed” does not refer to water. As we have seen, “the name of Jesus Christ” represents the authority of Jesus Christ, which each Christian has via holy spirit within.

So which baptism do *you* want—water or holy spirit? Which has more power to change the heart of a man or woman? Which is more practically relevant to powerful Christian living? There can be little doubt that many Christians today are focusing more on water, which is sadly ironic, because each and every one has *already been baptized with holy spirit*, as the

following verse, which has no direct relationship to water baptism, makes clear:

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we [Christians] were **all** baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all given the one Spirit [spirit] to drink.³

Think about what we have seen from God's matchless Word in this section of this booklet. Shortly before the Day of Pentecost, when the disciples were about to be among the first humans in history to be born again of God's incorruptible seed, holy spirit, Jesus plainly told them that a greater baptism than John's water baptism was coming. This greater baptism is the one by which all Christians have been joined together via God's gift of holy spirit. It is the *one baptism* pertinent to the Church today, as per Ephesians 4:5, which we have already seen. This New Birth baptism of "holy spirit" came to pass as recorded in Acts 2, apart from any water baptism.

Acts 2:1–4

- (1) When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.
- (2) Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
- (3) They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.
- (4) **All** of them were filled with the Holy Spirit [No "the." Read, holy spirit] and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

3. The Greek text literally reads, "in one spirit." This refers to the one gift of holy spirit into which each Christian has been fully immersed. However, most Bible versions read as does the NIV: "by one Spirit." This is the common instrumental use of the dative case, and it is also a legitimate translation of this phrase. But if the word "Spirit" is capitalized and translated as referring to a person, that person is Jesus Christ, our baptizer. We can biblically document that Jesus is referred to as "the Spirit" in 2 Corinthians 3:17a ("Now the Lord [Jesus] is the Spirit...") and in Revelation 2:7 ("He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit [Jesus, as per 1:12-19] says to the churches..."). Technically, "in one spirit" and "by one spirit" are both correct, and one reading from the Greek text would see this. This is the figure of speech called **amphibologia**, or **double entendre**, when one phrase has two meanings.

Ever since the Day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ has continued to baptize in holy spirit (his divine nature) *every person* who has confessed him as Lord according to Romans 10:9 and 10. Biblically speaking, the “baptism of holy spirit” is *synonymous with the New Birth*. So too is “the anointing” (2 Cor. 1:21 and 22), which is used in the Church Epistles only in reference to one’s being born again of the spirit of God.⁴ Despite what is taught in many charismatic circles today, there is absolutely no such thing as a “second work of grace,” or an “anointing,” or more holy spirit that one can receive from God beyond that which he receives in the New Birth.⁵ If you are a Christian, *you already have all the righteousness and all the enablements that God can give you*. Why? Because you have been “soaked” through and through with all that the *name of Jesus Christ* contains. Ephesians 1:3 says that each Christian has already been blessed with “every spiritual blessing.” The question we each must ask ourselves is: “Given whom God has made me to be and what He has enabled me to do, what am I doing about it?”

How sad that so many dear Christians are, in essence, arguing for something with far less potential and power because they have been taught that baptism connotes water. But remember, we have seen that the inherent definition of “baptism” has nothing to do with water, and that it is the context that determines the element in which the baptism takes place. As God plainly spelled out in Hebrews 7, 9, and 10 and 1 Peter 3,⁶ water baptism cannot do anything for the heart or conscience of a person. That is why it is called a “shadow” of the greater reality, and why it was replaced by the baptism in holy spirit. Water only symbolized the awesome gift that Jesus Christ came to make available to all who choose to believe in him as Lord. Let us now go on to see more of what we have in Christ, relative to the subject of this booklet.

4. See our book, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power To Be Like Christ*, Chapter 7.

5. Many charismatic Christians properly recognize that there are times when they seem to be “tapped into” God’s power in a greater than average way. This often happens in witnessing, teaching, or ministering healing. Sadly, this genuine experience gets mislabeled as “the anointing.” Biblically speaking, each and every Christian is “anointed” with the gift of holy spirit at the moment of his New Birth, and there is no further “anointing” mentioned in the Church Epistles. What then is the experience that is genuinely occurring in Christians’ lives when they are supernaturally empowered? It says in 1 Corinthians 12:6: “There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” The words “working” and “works” are the Greek words *energema* (noun) and *energeo* (verb), which refer to the spiritual energizing each Christian can experience. The Lord Jesus does indeed “energize” Christians via the gift of holy spirit, and because that is the vocabulary God uses in His Word, our using the same vocabulary will help us become united in our beliefs.

6. See Chapter 3.

Chapter 5

Baptized Into What, Or Rather Whom?

It is *critical* to note that despite the fact that most Christian churches today practice water baptism, *there is no command or requirement from God for Christians to do so*. In a previous “age,” under the Mosaic Law and before the Day of Pentecost, there *was* such a command and requirement, as we have seen from verses in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (covered in Chapter 2). For whom? For Jews and proselytes (Gentiles who converted to Judaism)—to be baptized in water. But, as Jesus told the disciples, that command was going to be, and now has been, superseded by the greater baptism in holy spirit. God’s gift of holy spirit cleanses a person internally at the moment of his New Birth when, via incorruptible seed from our heavenly Father, he is forever sealed “...in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

It is absolutely true that many first-century Christians did practice water baptism as a way for new converts to express their faith. Verses like Acts 2:38 and 41, 8:12ff, 9:18, 22:16 show that water baptism was a custom of the early Christian Church. Why? *Not because Jesus had commanded them to do so*. It was a custom for several other reasons. First, nearly all of the first Christians from the Day of Pentecost on had formerly been *Jews*, in whose minds the tradition of water baptism was very deeply ingrained. The book of Acts records the agonizing struggle involved in the transition from the old Jewish mindset to the truth of “...the administration of God’s grace...” (Eph. 3:2), progressively set forth by Paul in the Church Epistles. Jewish tradition, based largely upon circumcision and water baptism, did not readily give way to the new program for the Church, a program not of fleshly ordinances but of a quickening (life-giving) spirit.

The second reason why water baptism was a custom in the early Church was due to the fact that the New Testament epistles of Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews, which make it clear that water baptism was only a shadow of the coming baptism in holy spirit, were not written for nearly a generation after the Church began. It was about 21 years after the Day of Pentecost before the first Church Epistle was penned (*circa* 49 A.D.), and more than 30 years before Ephesians

and Colossians were written. During that time, there was no definitive revelation from God contradicting the Jewish custom of water baptism.

The third reason why water baptism continued as a custom in the early Church was that few, if any, of Jesus' original disciples had really understood what he said in Acts 1:5–8, and most were still practicing “the baptism of John.” Especially around Jerusalem, many ex-Jewish Christians were still “zealous for the law,” and the ritual of water baptism thus became deeply rooted in the Church. Even when the revelation of the Church Epistles was completely unfolded, and Ephesians 4:5 loudly proclaimed that there is only “**one baptism**” for the Church, most believers continued to practice the old tradition of water baptism. Sad to say that the same holds true to this day.

In regard to the persistence of Jewish tradition, think about what else Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1 at the same time he said that water baptism was on the way out. He told them to go into *all the world* and preach the Gospel to *every creature* (which includes the Gentiles). Did they? No, not for a long time. Historians say that it took about *ten years* before even one Gentile was accepted into the faith (Acts 10), and that 25 years after the start of the Church, Paul was still fiercely battling his Judaizing opponents, as evidenced by what he wrote in his letter to the Galatians. In fact, Galatians reveals that even Peter, who the Lord originally sent to the Gentiles (Acts 10), was still so deeply influenced by his Jewish roots that Paul had to have a face-to-face confrontation with him in order to keep him walking in the greater revelation he had been given years earlier (Gal. 2:11–14). Old habits truly do die hard.

It is significant that statements like that found in Philippians 3:3, where Paul says that Christians are to “...put no confidence in the flesh,” were written very late in his life after the revelation of “the Sacred Secret” of the “one Body of Christ” had been completely revealed to him. The progressive unfolding of these truths in the Church Epistles finally made significant inroads into the Church and many people realized that such Jewish rituals as circumcision and water baptism were no longer required.¹

1. It is sad to say that the early Christians who did understand about the true baptism were not enough to change the Christian world. The love of ritual, the desire to have some kind of ceremony defining who was and who was not “Christian,” and the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church for more than a thousand years virtually obliterated the truth that the “shadow,” water baptism, had been replaced by the *reality* of immersion into holy spirit. The Reformation produced change in the ritual of water baptism but, for the most part, Protestant churches have not yet regained the great truth and understanding about it.

The fact that the first Christians were very steeped in their former Judaistic traditions explains why they continued baptizing new converts in water. In Acts 8, for example, Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch at his request. It is significant that the eunuch, not a Jew, had just come from Jerusalem, the headquarters for Judaism, where he had gone “to worship.” Perhaps he was considering becoming a proselyte to Judaism. After hearing and believing what Philip taught him about Jesus Christ, he asked to be baptized in the river, and Philip was glad to comply, in accordance with his previous Jewish background dictating that proselytes were to be baptized.

The early Christians carried on pretty much as they had as Jews under the Mosaic Law until God was finally able to convince at least some of them that Jesus “...Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness...” (Rom. 10:4 - KJV). Saul’s conversion (Acts 9) was the first step, and the next chapter of Acts contains the account of a landmark occurrence in the early Church. How hard was it for someone who had been a Jew all his life, until the Day of Pentecost when he suddenly became a Christian, to jettison his Jewish mindset and accept the truth of a greater, internal baptism? *Peter* is a perfect example. In Acts 10, it took the Lord Jesus giving him a rather remarkable three-exposure vision of a “floating zoo” complete with audio exhortation to get him to go to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. There Peter found out that the New Birth and the corresponding gift of holy spirit was for Gentiles too, something he should have known from what Jesus taught the disciples in Acts 1.

When Peter got to Cornelius’ home, he was surprised to find that Cornelius had also heard from God and was hungry to hear the truth about Jesus Christ. Peter thus began his soon-to-be-interrupted sermon with these words: “...I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34 and 35).

Shortly after Peter had set forth enough of God’s Word for Cornelius and his relatives and close friends to be born again, his teaching was shockingly interrupted:

Acts 10:44–46 (ESV)

(44) While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] fell on all who heard the word.

(45) And the believers from among the circumcised [Jews] who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] was poured out even on the Gentiles.

(46) For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God...

Unless you have ever been steeped in unmitigated prejudice toward a particular group of people, you probably cannot begin to identify with what an incredible shock this was for Peter and the other Jews who were there with him. “Amazed” is putting it mildly! The Jews considered the Gentiles in the same category as *dogs*, which is how they referred to them. Think about it: how disconcerting would it be for you to be teaching the Bible at your home fellowship and have your pet beagle suddenly begin speaking in tongues, evidencing the fact that it was born again?! Seriously, that’s about how shocked Peter was when Cornelius and all the other Gentile “*dogs*” did just that. And I believe Peter got flustered:

Act 10:47 and 48a

(47) “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] just as we have.”

(48a) So he ordered that they be baptized **in the name of Jesus Christ...**

Most Christians read these verses and assume that Cornelius and his cohorts were then submerged. Even if they were, it was not because God’s Word prescribed it. But there is another way to look at this. First of all, the Bible does not say that they *were* baptized in water—it says Peter *ordered* that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, which I believe does imply water as per his previously Jewish mindset. But was that command carried out? Not necessarily. Acts 11 begins by stating that the news of what happened at the home of Cornelius swept across Judea, and that the still-zealous-for-the-old-water-baptism church leaders back in Jerusalem quickly confronted Peter about his going into the home of a Gentile “*dog*.” He told his inquisitors the whole story, just as Acts 10 records it, but when he got to the part about the Gentiles speaking in tongues, he said:

Acts 11:15–17 (ESV)

(15) As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit] fell on them just as on us at the beginning.

(16) **And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit].’**

(17) If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

When did Peter remember that Jesus had said, “Hey, water’s out, holy spirit’s in”? We cannot be certain, but it is surely possible that he remembered it right after he blurted out, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized in water?” His next thought may well have been, “Well, actually *I* can, because I just remembered what Jesus said about it.” Based upon the overall scope of what Scripture declares about baptism, it is feasible to believe that Cornelius was not baptized with water. But, again, even if he was baptized, it was not because baptism was a prescribed ritual for the Church, it was because Peter, with his deep-rooted Jewish mindset, forgot what Jesus had said and was still “zealous for the Law” (Acts 21:20).

Paul also fought his own mental and emotional battle against the Jewish traditionalism for which he had been as zealous as he later became for the Lord Jesus Christ. He succeeded in overcoming his traditional mindset, and pioneered the preaching of the truth that he ultimately compiled in Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians—the heart of the Word for the Christian Church. Let us look at what he said regarding water baptism as he addressed divisions regarding it (and other things) among the Corinthian believers:

1 Corinthians 1:13–17

(13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

(14) **I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you** except Crispus and Gaius,

(15) so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.

(16) (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)

(17) **For Christ did not send me to baptize**, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul does admit that he baptized a few people in water according to the old tradition, and we can only speculate as to why. Based upon his Epistles, it is unlikely that Paul was still zealous for the Law like many other ex-Jewish Christians. A more plausible explanation is that the people he baptized were desirous to keep this custom, and he decided to accede to their wishes, much like in Acts 8 when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch who asked him to do so. Paul makes it very clear, however, that water baptism was an insignificant part of his ministry.

It is very important to realize that Paul could not have said, “... Christ did not send me to baptize...” if Christ had in fact commanded Christians to go into the world and make disciples and baptize them in *water* (Matt. 28:19). Christ did command us to go into the world and make disciples and baptize them, but it is Church tradition, not the Bible, that says this baptism means in water. We have already seen that we are now to be baptized, fully immersed, in holy spirit. If Christ did not command water baptism, and he did not send Paul to baptize, how can water baptism be necessary for salvation? It cannot. Furthermore, Paul would not have been “thankful” that he baptized only a few people if it were a prerequisite to being saved.

On page 99 of his book, *Baptism*, Donald Lake’s comment on this section of Scripture is most pertinent:

That Paul did not conceive of baptism as an essential saving element is clearly indicated by 1 Corinthians 1:10–18. For Paul, there seems to be one essential baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit by which we are incorporated into the body of Christ (cp. 12:12 and 13; Eph. 4:4 and 5). The rest of the New Testament corpus does not present a unified picture regarding the meaning and administration of baptism.

1 Corinthians 1:17 is the key to understanding this section of Scripture. Paul not only states that Jesus Christ did not command him to baptize people in water, but he also contrasts what Christ did *not* send him to do, baptize people in water, with what Christ *did* send him to do, preaching the Gospel. Why? Because the “Good News” for the Church Administration, properly called **the administration of the Sacred Secret** (Eph. 3:9), is not about a ceremonial outer washing required by an externally-imposed law. It is not about a man’s own works—like water baptism. No, it is about a life-saving internal wholeness that comes by God’s grace in response to one’s heartfelt obedience to Romans 10:9. The ritual of water baptism is *not* a part of the Gospel in

the Church administration, this age of grace in which we now live. Just like circumcision, water baptism is not “good news.”

Identification with Christ

We saw in Colossians 2:11 and 12 (in Chapter 4) that a Christian has been “buried” with Christ via holy spirit baptism into him, and also raised with Christ into newness of life. What this is all about is the *identification with Christ* that each Christian has, and what it was that brought about that identification. This subject of each believer’s identification with Christ is one that gets a lot of ink in the Church Epistles. The following verses in 1 Corinthians 10 shed much light on what it means that each Christian is “baptized into Christ.”

1 Corinthians 10:1–5

- (1) For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.
- (2) **They were all baptized into Moses** in the cloud and in the sea.
- (3) They all ate the same spiritual food
- (4) and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied [followed (later in time)] them [the texts omit “them”], and that rock was Christ.²
- (5) Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Nearly all Christian commentators agree that Moses was in many ways a type of Christ. It was Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. He was at that time the “head” of Israel, so to speak. 1 Corinthians 10:2 states that all the Israelites were “*baptized into Moses*.” Moses was the element into which each Israelite was figuratively immersed. What does that mean? It means that each and every one of them was *identified with Moses* in God’s sight when they crossed the Red Sea and went from bondage into

2. The use of “accompanied” instead of “followed” in the NIV is unwarranted. The Greek word means “followed.” It is translated as “followed” or “follow” 73 times in the NIV, and accompanied” only twice (once here, and once when the disciples “followed” Christ.) It is unfortunate that the NIV reads “accompanied,” because Christ did not “accompany” the Israelites. He followed them in time, i.e., he came later in history.

the hope of a new life. Everything that God gave to and did for Moses, He gave to and did for each Israelite who chose to follow Moses—provision and protection “...in the cloud and in the sea.” Those who followed Moses all “...ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink...” that he did.

Let us note what the *NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon* says in regard to the Greek word *baptizo*, used in 1 Corinthians 10:2 above:

[it means] to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk); to cleanse by dipping or submerging; to wash; to make clean with water; to wash one’s self; bathe.

It goes on to say:

This is not to be confused with *bapto*. The clearest example that shows the meaning of *baptizo* is a text from the Greek poet and physician, Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles, and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be “dipped” (*bapto*) into boiling water and then “baptised” (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution.

Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution, but the first is temporary. The second, the act of “baptizing” the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When used in the New Testament, this word more often refers to our [spiritual] union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism... There must be a union with him, a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle! (*Bible Study Magazine*, James Montgomery Boice, May, 1989)³

Metaphorically and prophetically, the “spiritual rock that followed,” more than 1400 years later, was Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah for Israel. As Moses believed God’s promise of a Savior and followed God in that light, all the Israelites who followed him were saved by that same promise because they were “one” with Moses. Likewise, all those today who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord are “baptized into him” and forever become one with him in God’s sight. Then, as we walk in the steps of our Lord, provision and protection are ours in the wilderness of life. The difference between us and the Israelites is that we are guaranteed the “Promised Land”

3. Go to this website: (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/baptizo.html>) to see this quote in its entirety.

to come because of the finished work of Jesus Christ and our salvation by grace through faith in him. Amen.

The Red Sea experience is Scripture's Old Testament benchmark for the power and goodness of God, just as the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the New Testament benchmark.⁴ Each is what God refers to in Scripture as the standard of His power to deliver and redeem His people. In the above verses in 1 Corinthians, the point is that "in Moses" *every Israelite* crossed the Red Sea and thus had the potential to enjoy the Promised Land. Similarly, "in Christ" *every Christian* is forever separated from the bondage of Satan and has the potential to enjoy the promises relevant to this current Church Administration.

But notice in verse 5 that even though every one of the Israelites was baptized into Moses and thereby had the opportunity for everything Moses had, "most" of them chose to turn away from God and thereby reaped the consequences of their disobedience. Likewise, Christians today can choose either to follow the Lord Jesus Christ or turn away from him. Those who refuse to follow him will suffer consequences, but the Good News today is that the name of Jesus Christ means a lot more than the name of Moses! Because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us by his sinless life and substitutionary death, and what God did in his resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, every Christian, regardless of how he "drives" in this life, is guaranteed "a parking place in Paradise," that is, **everlasting life**. *Rewards*, however, will vary from person to person according to how each believer conducted himself after his New Birth.

Remember, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians were all baptized by ["in"] one spirit into one body, so we all have been "soaked" in the same thing. In Moses? In Paul? No, in *Christ Jesus*. The true baptism is not just putting some water on someone, or putting someone in some water. It is the awesome spiritual nature of God in Christ in us soaking us through and through, making us whole, and giving us the power and potential to be like our Lord Jesus. As Colossians 2:10 (KJV) says, each believer is "complete" in Christ. *Every Christian* has equal opportunity to maximize the limitless spiritual potential resident within him. *That* is God News (I meant "Good," but let's just leave that divinely-inspired typo)!

Consider the following verses that augment the aforementioned truth that every Christian belongs to Christ and can "show him off" to the world:

4. See our booklet, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt: 23 Arguments for the Historical Validity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

Galatians 3:26 and 27

(26) You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

(27) for all of you who were **baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

Clothing is a very important part of life for almost everyone. It is a daily topic of conversation all over the world, and most people feel quite uncomfortable if they are not appropriately dressed. Thankfully, each Christian is “properly dressed” because each has been **clothed with Christ**. We can be sure that when God looks at us Christians, He sees us clothed with Christ. As in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 22 about the king’s wedding feast where only those who wore the robe he supplied could come in, God sees each Christian clothed in a white robe and righteous in His sight. Now it is up to us to make our behavior line up with what’s on the inside so that those around us can see what we’re “wearing.”

As in Galatians 3:27, a number of Scripture verses in the Church Epistles, such as 1 Corinthians 12:13 that we looked at earlier, use similar language to speak of “baptism” or “baptize”—without mentioning *water*. Due to the erroneous traditional teaching they have received, most Christians immediately associate water with the word “baptism.” However, we have no more right to automatically read the word “water” into the word “baptism” (when neither the text itself nor the context indicate that it is there) than we do to read “literal circumcision of the foreskin” into the word “circumcision.” Philippians 3:3 says “circumcision,” but it refers to spiritual circumcision, not fleshly. Similarly, many verses use “baptize,” but refer to holy spirit baptism, not water.

We will conclude this section titled “Baptized Into What, or Rather Whom?” with some classic verses that should put the finishing touch on our understanding of the great truth about what it means to be baptized into Christ. These verses in Romans 6 immediately follow the doctrinal heart of the book of Romans: Chapter 5, verses 12–21, wherein the most foundational message of God’s Word is summarized.

In Romans 5:12–21, the stark contrast between the “two Adams” is capsulized, showing their antithetical behaviors and the totally opposite results thereof.⁵ The First Adam’s disobedience brought death unto all men, leaving them with no alternative but “outside-in” living, that is, reacting to the satanic stimuli around them so as to **gratify the cravings of their**

4. See our book, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*.

sinful nature (Eph. 2:3). Scripture calls Jesus Christ “the last Adam,” and his obedience made possible everlasting life to all who believe in him, and an alternative “inside-out” lifestyle now, that is, choosing to respond to circumstances according to the spirit and the Word of God. In Christ, God’s abundant grace more than made up for the sin of Adam.

Romans 6:1–7

(1) What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

(2) By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

(3) Or don’t you know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**

(4) We were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

(5) If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

(6) For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with [rendered inoperable], that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

(7) because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

The subject of Romans 6 and 7 is the battle between the old, sin nature inherent in each descendant of Adam and the new, righteous nature now born into each child of God, that is, each Christian. In the above verses, a Christian’s total identification with Christ should be clear. When we were “baptized into Christ Jesus,” we were figuratively immersed into his death. Note the pattern of *death unto life*: Jesus had to die in order to be raised from the dead unto a greater life. Unfortunately, the NIV Study Bible authors mistakenly assume that being “baptized into Christ Jesus” means being baptized in water, but what they say in their note on verses 3 and 4 is right if taken in regard to the true baptism in holy spirit:

...Baptism depicts graphically what happens as a result of the Christian’s union with Christ, which comes with faith—through faith we are united with Christ, just as through our natural birth we are united with Adam. As we fell into sin and became subject to death in father Adam, so we now have died and been raised again with Christ—which baptism symbolizes.

Remember that the water of Noah's flood both destroyed all the wicked people and saved all the good people. Likewise, our individual immersion into Christ figuratively "killed" (literally, gave each of us power to "reckon dead") our "old man" (our sin nature) and gave us the ability to "...walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4 - KJV). That is, we died to the *penalty* of sin, and are thus guaranteed everlasting life. Romans 6:8-14 goes on to tell us how to overcome the *power* of sin still resident within us—by reckoning it dead and refusing to succumb to it.

There are many Christians who realize that water baptism is a lesser baptism than that of holy spirit and actually accomplishes nothing spiritually significant for a person. Nonetheless, some, equating it to wearing a wedding ring (not required by law, but symbolic of a union), advocate it as an important, though symbolic, public act signifying one's repentance, salvation, and commitment to Christ. When confronted with the fact that Scripture nowhere says anything like that, some have justified their belief by stating that water baptism is what the historic Christian Church has chosen as a holy sacrament.

That raises the question of whether or not Scripture gives any Christian the right of *fide implicitus*. Historically, certain dignitaries were granted this authority of "implied fidelity," in which the recipient is deemed trustworthy and above reproach in terms of decision making. He could thus issue binding edicts about doctrine or practice among the people under the rule of the king or whoever gave him this right. The Bible makes it clear that only one man has ever been granted such authority by God, and that, of course, is Jesus Christ. After his ascension and exaltation as "Lord," Jesus said, "...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). Clearly, neither God nor the Lord Jesus has issued any edict requiring water baptism for Christians for any reason, and thus no church or man has the right to do so.

The "one baptism" for Christians is *not* that of being dipped into water. Rather, it is as if we were immersed into the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, who pours into our thirsty souls living water, the life-giving holy spirit of God, His own divine nature. It is that presence and power that nourishes us each day so that we can walk through this darkening world with newness of life and serve Him in newness of spirit.

Conclusion

Cleanliness is Next to Godliness, But Godliness Comes First

In the Introduction, I mentioned what Jesus said in John 8:32, which is that if one knows (experientially) the truth, it will set him free. The obvious converse to that succinct truth is that if one believes and practices error, it puts him in some degree of bondage. Scripture makes it clear that each human being lives in a war zone. There is a war in progress between God and Satan, and the chief weapon used by both sides is *words*. God gives us His Word, and Satan counterfeits and distorts it.

God wants people to know the truth and be free, and Satan wants to obscure the truth from people and keep them in bondage. His goal is always to “...steal and kill and destroy...” (John 10:10). One way he does this is by blinding people’s minds to “...the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...” (2 Cor. 4:4). If it is true that water baptism is irrelevant to Christians and not prescribed in Scripture for us, then any teaching to the contrary must have its roots in error. Relevant questions to ask might be: “Why would the Enemy want Christians to think that water baptism is either required or pertinent?” “What is he trying to steal from us?”

I think part of the answer to those questions lies in the fact that a chief element of the “...gospel of the glory of Christ...” is that because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, each Christian stands righteous before God by *faith alone*. There is no particular merit in our faith; there is merit on the part of Jesus Christ in what he accomplished for us. His work made it possible for us to simply trust in him and receive salvation as a free gift, and that goes against the grain of our fallen nature, which craves inordinate recognition from God, and from other people, for our good works. Our sin nature also craves ritual as an avenue to feeling good about ourselves before God and others. By emphasizing the ritual of baptism in water, Satan tries to steal our focus from the fact that salvation and the holy spirit are free gifts acquired by faith.

In light of what we have seen from the Word of God as to the holy spirit baptism that each person in the Church Administration receives in the gift of salvation, where does that leave water baptism? Biblically, the logical conclusion is that water baptism is at best superfluous and at worst a fleshly work by which one hopes to stand approved before God and people. Is it a sin? No, but it *is* a sin to teach that water baptism is a requirement for

salvation and membership in the Church, which is the Body of Christ. And because God's Word does not say that it is at all pertinent to or necessary for a Christian, then it may well be detrimental to the quality of one's life to teach him that it is a "symbolic public act" or a "proclamation of faith" prescribed by Scripture.

Another thing that Satan steals from the Church by the ritual of water baptism is our Christian unity. One needs only to read the history books to see the disunity and dissension about water baptism. Why so much variation in denominational doctrines about baptism? Because the Church Epistles have no instruction about it. So denominations must make up their own rules and regulations, and then they eventually argue about whose rules are correct. The reason there is no instruction about it in Scripture is that water baptism is "out" and holy spirit baptism is "in," and the instructions for being baptized into holy spirit are the same as for getting saved, that is, "...confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead..." (Rom. 10:9).

In the Law of Moses, there were many regulations about washing and cleansing, but with the baptism in holy spirit it does not matter how you get saved, when you get saved, who got you to the point of salvation (priest or commoner, saint or sinner) or what age you are when you get saved. There is nothing to fight about, everyone is blessed that someone got saved and is now fully immersed in the gift of holy spirit.

Still another thing that gets stolen from the Church by the distracting focus on water baptism is the witness to the world of a unified spiritual community. This relates to the point above, but it is separate and valid. Jesus said that people would know who his disciples are by their love for one another. Yet, the Protestant Reformation was characterized by the Roman Catholic Church torturing and murdering many people because they did not baptize in the "right way." For centuries, the Church had propounded infant baptism, and, in the early years of the Reformation, baptism of adults at the time of their conversion to Christ was considered an extreme heresy, even though it is completely accepted today. Those who had the audacity to baptize an adult at the time of his conversion were occasionally punished by death, and sometimes that sentence was carried out by drowning. Alan Eyre writes on the history of the Reformation:

His Gruningen [a town in Switzerland] brethren and sisters suffered grievously a few months later and many of them were drowned. This method of execution was intended as a mockery

of their Baptist practices: Zwingli laconically called it “their third baptism.”¹

It is horrifying to modern Christians that good and decent people were drowned simply because they immersed themselves in water when they were adults rather than had water sprinkled on them when they were babies, but that is what happened. Unfortunately, modern Christians are not the only ones horrified. Non-Christians are hardly drawn to Christ by such displays, and even though we are not killing one another over the when’s, why’s, and how’s of baptism today, division in the Church about it has an unfavorable impact. The way to stop the influence of error in the field of baptism is to get back to what the Bible actually says. We must discover what the proper doctrine is, then believe it and practice it. In the case of baptism, that means we leave water baptism behind and focus on the full immersion we have in the gift of holy spirit, with all its inherent potential to empower.

Let us close this study with a fabulous passage of Scripture that embodies many of the truths we have seen so far. Allow these Words of life to wash over your heart as you read.

Titus 3:3–8

(3) At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

(4) But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,

(5) he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal** by the Holy Spirit [No “the.” Read, holy spirit],

(6) whom [which] he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,

(7) so that, having become justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life [life in the coming age].

(8) This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

1. Alan Eyre, *The Protestors* (Billing and Sons Limited, Worchester, Great Britain, 1985, p. 49).

Please allow me to offer in one paragraph a perhaps grossly literal rendering of the above verses that I think colloquially captures the truth therein:

Once upon a time we were out to lunch in the wrong restaurant with no menu. Our street address was “Nowhere.” Unable to find anyone among us to do the job of saving us, God took pity on us and had a Son whom He asked to do it. Being dead in sin, we were unemployed, producing nothing and needing God’s welfare. He picked us up out of the gutter, scrubbed us with His guaranteed-to-whiten cleanser, and rinsed us “thoroughly” with the living water of His holy spirit that bubbled up through Jesus Christ. He is the fountain through whom God did all this, and now we can always drink all we want. Now we have a clean slate, and we are looking forward to cashing in on our inheritance when Jesus shows up for us. Until the big day, we had best get busy doing all we can to show our gratitude by using what God has given us so that everyone around us can benefit.

Yes, water is essential for physical life, but not for spiritual life. What is *really* essential is the living water of God’s gift of holy spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ once received from his Father and now lavishly pours out upon each person who chooses to believe in him. That living water not only gives each Christian life once and for all, but it can also quench our thirst each day as we walk with him through a dry and parched world where countless people are dying of thirst. As the one and only spring of living water, Jesus has poured into our hearts the very life of God.

Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus can experience the absolute proof that this spring is within him and that it will never dry up. Not only is it a spring that guarantees us life in the coming age, it is also a fountain of blessing on a daily basis: a spring of love, joy, peace, guidance, understanding, revelation, wisdom, and healing. As we drink of this living water, we are energized to go forth and lead others to this fountain of life. With the spirit of God in our hearts and the Word of God in our minds and on our lips, we can go to those wasting away in spiritual deserts and guide them to the living water that will truly quench their thirst—the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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What Is The Living Truth Fellowship?

The Living Truth Fellowship is an international community of Christian believers connected by the love of God, the spirit of God, and a common belief of the truth as it is revealed in the written Word of God. We desire to make known that truth to as many people as possible. As a legal entity, we are a non-profit, tax-exempt United States (Indiana) corporation: The Living Truth Fellowship, Ltd.

The name of our ministry contains an intentional double entendre. The Word of God is the truth (John 17:17), and because it contains the very life of God (Eph. 4:18), it is the living truth (John 6:63; Heb. 4:12). As such, the word “living” is an adjective. But God intends that His truth be practiced, that is, He wants us to make “living” a verb by being living epistles of His truth. In that sense, being “verbal” means more than just speaking the Word; it also means doing it.

Our Father desires that we put His truth in our “inner parts” (Ps. 51:6) so that we might not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11). God looks on the heart of each person, and He does not measure the quality of one’s life by how much Bible he knows, but by how much knowledge of the truth he practices in his relationships, that is, how much of the heart of God does he manifest. We can objectively measure the quality of our lives by the quality of our relationships with people (Mark 12:28–31; 1 John 4:20 and 21).

Jesus Christ is our supreme example. In John 17:17, he said: “your word is truth,” and he exerted a lifelong effort to learn it precisely. But Jesus also LIVED the truth so flawlessly that he could say, I AM the truth (John 14:6). In other words, he BE true. And those are the two sides of the coin of truth, if you will: doctrinal and practical, propositional and relational. Without both sides, that coin won’t spend, that is, people won’t “buy” what we have to offer.

Our mission is to provide accurate biblical teaching so as to make known the Lord Jesus Christ, The Living Truth, and thus facilitate a worldwide community of mature Christians committed to following him by living the truth of God’s Word and sharing it with others.

We accomplish that mission by way of live teachers, camps and conferences for all ages and categories of people, books, newsletters, audio and video teachings, and internet outreach via our website. Those who choose to partake of and participate in these aspects of our ministry are free to utilize our resources as they see fit, whether by starting their own local fellowship or using our work in an already established group of Christians. Our goal is to provide avenues for individual Christians to exercise their unique callings in the Body of Christ.

The basis of all our belief and practice is the Bible, which is the revealed Word of God, flawless in its original writing by those 40 or so believers who wrote during a period of about 1500 years “...as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21 - NKJV). An honest look at the Bible reveals a coherence that is impossible for those writers to have achieved by collaboration. So-called “errors” or “contradictions” are due to man’s subsequent interference in the transmission of the text, or to mistranslations, or to misunderstandings of what is written. We seek truth rather than the religious traditions of men.

Our goal in setting forth the Scriptures is to enable each believer to understand them for himself so he can develop his own convictions, become an effective communicator of God’s Word, and fulfill his individual ministry in the Body of Christ. Jesus said that knowing the truth would set one free (John 8:32), and our teachings have practical benefit in terms of one’s quality of life—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

One of our goals is to teach the Word to “...faithful men who are able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2 - NKJV). We plan to produce seminars and courses of study whereby those who so choose can become able ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will ordain to Christian ministry those whom our faith community recognizes as meeting this criterion, whether by training in our ministry or via an ordination they received elsewhere that we recognize.