

### **BAPTISM and BAPTISM**

The sacrament of Baptism has been observed for centuries by nearly all religious denominations who call themselves Christian. The ordinance has held a position of pre-eminent honor, being considered the door of entrance to the nominal church. The rite has been almost universally accepted, but like many another orthodox belief, it has often been the center of controversy. especially since the 16th century.

Baptism was new to God's people at the time of John the Baptist. There a no Biblical command to baptize during the four millenniums prior to his ministry.

There were, however, frequent references to washings. Ceremonial washings for the purification of everything from basins and articles of clothing to individuals were, well known in Israel from the days of Moses. The Israelites were, commanded to "wash their clothes" to be prepared to receive the law from Mount Sinai. Aaron was commanded to "wash his flesh in water" before donning the priestly garments. Other forms of "uncleanness" were to be cleansed by washing with water according to Moses' law.

The prophets used the symbol of washing in calling on the people to cleanse from sin: "*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes, Cease to do evil, Learn to do good.*"

*"O Jerusalem. wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?"*

*"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin....Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Isa. 1:16-17: Jer. 4:14: Ps. 51:2, 7). Cleanliness was equated with holiness. Holiness required that the individual be clean both without and within.

Our study will deal with two basic baptisms: 1) the literal rite of baptism, as practiced by John the Baptist, Jesus and His apostles; 2) the "one" baptism. of which the literal rite was a symbol, the total cleansing from sin, "buried with [Christ] by baptism into death."

We will study both the nature and purpose of baptism as it was commanded in the Bible and used in the early Church. Our study will cover:

- Water Baptism: What Is It?
- Baptism in Scripture John's Baptism
- Jesus and Baptism
- The Apostles' Baptism
- The "One" Baptism

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### **Water BAPTISM: What Is It?**

Baptism is variously defined as an initiatory rite, a symbolic washing, an immersion in water signifying the removal of sin. It is well defined in the Standard Bible Encyclopedia: "Baptism, as taught in the New Testament, is the picture of death and burial to sin and resurrection to new life, a picture of what has already taken place in the heart, not the means by which spiritual change is wrought. It is a privilege and duty, not a necessity."

The Greek words most commonly used in the New Testament to denote the rite of baptism are the verb baptizo and the nouns baptisma and baptismos. In general the noun baptismos was used to denote ceremonial purification and baptisma to denote the Christian baptism. Baptizo is used today in Greece for baptism. The Greeks have never substituted pouring or sprinkling for immersion as have various other faiths, but the Greek church practices trine immersion-one immersion for each person of the triune Godhead in which they believe.

The significance of baptism varies among denominations. Some claim it is absolutely essential to salvation and as a result baptize both infants and the indigent. (It was this practice that brought about the use of sprinkling, as not all were physically able to walk into and out of the water.)

The manner of baptism has given rise to much controversy, but whether a candidate was immersed or sprinkled is immaterial to our study. We are concerned only with the Biblical aspects of baptism.

### **Baptism in Scripture**

Details concerning the exact time of the institution of baptism as a religious rite are lacking in ecclesiastical history. As mentioned previously, there was no baptismal rite in Judaism, though ceremonial washings were common. Being familiar with these washings, early Christians would not have found the new rite entirely unfamiliar. And by the time of Christ, history records that Gentile converts were being instructed in Judaism, then received into the Jewish community by baptism; but unlike Christian baptism, the Jewish proselyte baptized himself.

It was against this background that Christian baptism was instituted. When a person became a believer and was instructed in the Christian faith he was baptized. The Biblical record leads us to believe that baptism was always by immersion, usually in a river or stream.

There has been considerable debate between denominations concerning the baptism of infants. Infant baptism is neither forbidden nor commanded in the New Testament Scriptures, but there are reasons for believing that baptism was limited to adults. Repentance and faith were both required of the individual to be baptized and infants would have been incapable of either.

Baptism in the New Testament was more than a ceremonial washing. It was a public declaration of the convert's intention to change his manner of life. The Greek word baptizo held a broader meaning

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than merely to dip. The man who was under the control of any passion-anger, fear, love-or who was overcome with wine or with sleep, was said to be “baptized” with these. Thus baptism symbolized a complete immersion in the water of life, the beginning of a new life completely controlled by the Word of God.

According to the late William Barclay, baptism symbolized three things: A thorough cleansing of body and soul; a clean break in the life of the convert, and a union with Christ. Writes Mr. Barclay, “We are told how one missionary when he baptized his converts made them enter the river by one bank, baptized them, and sent them out on the other bank, as if at the moment of baptism a line had been drawn in their lives which sent them out to a new world, to a new life.”

Baptism expressed spiritual unity. By being baptized, the believer surrendered his life to Christ, acknowledging that he was in complete agreement with the teachings of Christ and the apostles. By submitting to baptism the convert promised to be morally clean, to be a faithful disciple of Christ, to dedicate his life to the service of God and Christ.

### **John’s Baptism**

For many years prior to the birth of John the Baptist, we have no record of any prophet or any visible manifestations from God. Among many of the Jews, the righteousness of God had been abandoned and replaced with self-righteousness. God’s law had become nearly obscured by the interpretations of the scribes who acted as instructors of the people. The greater part of the nation, led by these blind guides, were with them hastening to destruction while the few who still sought the God of their fathers were as sheep without a shepherd because the priesthood had become corrupt.

John’s mission had been revealed to his father Zacharias by an angel: “He shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). “As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Luke 3:4). John’s work was to prepare the way for Christ.

John’s ministry was characterized by his warning to the Jews to repent and return to God, to prepare to meet their King. His baptism required:

### **Repentance**

John the Baptist called for repentance. True repentance is not in simply being sorry for sin, but in doing something about it. “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for [unto, margin] the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:4-5).

### **Good Fruits**

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When John saw many of the Jews coming to his baptism, he said unto them, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance [margin, answerable to amendment of life]: ... And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt. 3:7-8, 10). To repent and be baptized was only a beginning; they must bear fruit or they would not escape condemnation. Baptism symbolized a cleansing, but a thorough cleansing is not done in a moment; to become acceptable to God requires continuous right living.

John’s ministry and baptism were for an express purpose and for a particular period of time. He was sent to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” to prepare Israel to accept the soon-coming Messiah. He contrasted his baptism with that which was to come: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:11-12).

Baptism was later accompanied by Holy Spirit power, as Bible testimony confirms. The “baptism with fire” is yet future, “fire” being a symbol of God’s coming judgments.

When Jesus the promised Messiah appeared and was baptized by John, John’s work was finished.

### **Jesus and Baptism**

When Jesus appeared on the scene and asked John to baptize Him, John “*forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*” or as rendered by the New English translation, “John tried to dissuade him. ‘Do you come to me?’ he said; ‘I need rather to be baptized by you.’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so for the present; we do well to conform in this way with all that God requires.’ John then allowed him to come” (Matt. 3:13-15).

### **Did Jesus Baptize?**

Certain verses in the Gospel of John appear to give conflicting reports as to whether or not Jesus baptized. John 3:22 reads: “*After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.*” This verse would lead one to believe that Jesus Himself baptized, were it not for John’s explanation in the following chapter. John 4:1-2, in the New English translation reads: “A report now reached the Pharisees: ‘Jesus is winning and baptizing more disciples than John’; although, in fact, it was only the disciples who were baptizing and not Jesus himself.” Accepting John’s word, we must conclude that Jesus baptized only through His disciples whom He appointed and commissioned to do so.

### **The “Great Commission”**

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Except for His post-resurrection commission to the Eleven, we have no record where Jesus commanded the apostles to baptize. Mark's report of Jesus' instructions makes it appear that baptism was a foregone conclusion, but both Luke and John fail to mention it, leading some to believe that baptism was not in use in the Church at the beginning.

Jesus' command to the apostles, commonly recognized as "The Great Commission" reads: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20).

This commission is accepted by many as a mandate to evangelize the world. However, we believe the command was limited to the Apostolic Age. The Greek word *aion* here translated "age" refers rather to a specific length of time, as an age. It is translated "age" in many of the newer versions. This "age" would have been the Jewish age which ended with the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. The power to perform miracles also ceased at that time.

Bible testimony supports this view. Paul, the last of the apostles, wrote to the Colossians of "*the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven,*" and to the Roman brethren, "*Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*" (Col. 1:23; Rom. 10:18). The commission had been fulfilled; they had preached the gospel to the nations then in existence.

### **The Apostles Baptized**

The Gospels make little reference to baptism as a part of the Christian faith. John's baptism is recorded in all four Gospels, but only in the Gospel of John is mention made of the apostles' baptizing during Jesus' ministry.

After Jesus' ascension, which was followed in ten days by Pentecost, baptism was more prominent. Baptism was a sign that the convert was willing to cast his lot with the Christians, to uphold the doctrine of the faith, even to the point of death. A study of the Acts of the Apostles reveals that baptism was reserved for true believers and was not done indiscriminately. We learn also that certain conditions were to be met before the candidate was baptized.

### **Repentance**

The first condition was repentance. By this requirement they were showing that the natural Jew was not a child of God just because he was a Jew. To be eligible for the Kingdom, the Jew must repent and turn from his sin the same as a Gentile. The first step to repentance was confession, and to be baptized, the candidate was required to confess his sins and ask forgiveness. "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized....*," said Peter, and again, "*Repent therefore and be converted,*" (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Repentance demands action, a turning from sin, not just an empty promise.

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William Barclay gives a comprehensive analysis of repentance: “‘Repent,’ said Peter, ‘first and foremost.’ The word originally meant an afterthought, a second thought. Often a second thought shows that the first thought was wrong; and so the word came to mean a change of mind; but, if a man is an honest man, a change of mind demands a change of action. Repentance must involve both change of mind and change of action. A man may change his mind and come to see that his actions were wrong, but he may be so much in love with his old ways that he does not change his ways. A man may change his ways but his mind may remain exactly the same. He may only change because of fear; his heart still loves the old ways and, if the chance comes, he will lapse into them. True repentance involves a change of mind and a change of action.” Baptism itself did nothing to remove the sin.

### **Knowledge/ Belief**

Instruction must precede baptism. Philip, one of the first deacons of the Church chosen by the apostles, taught the Ethiopian eunuch the principles of the Christian faith before he was baptized. When the eunuch asked to be baptized, Philip said, “*If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized]*” (Acts 8:37). To believe with all one’s heart is to render more than lip service. To merely speak the words “I believe” would not be really believing. The true believer will back up his words with action. The eunuch was a true believer.

### **“Receiving the Word”**

We read that following Peter’s Pentecost sermon, “*those who gladly received his word were baptized*” (Acts 2:41). It would be impossible for one to believe until he knew what to believe, hence the necessity for receiving instruction before baptism. We note that they “gladly received” Peter’s words, the words of eternal life which he had received from Jesus. Peter was following the instructions of the Master, preaching “*repentance and remission of sins*” (Luke 24:47). They were willing to listen and learn and change their ways, and they did it with joy.

### **The First Baptisms by the Apostles**

#### **Baptism “en masse”**

The first baptism following Pentecost must have been quite a spectacle. We are not told the details as to how so large a baptism was accomplished, but it was surely a rewarding experience for the apostles who had so recently lost their Master. The mass baptism followed Peter’s call to repentance: “Each one of you must turn from sin, return to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; ... Then Peter preached a long sermon, telling about Jesus and strongly urging all his listeners to save themselves from the evils of their nation. And those who believed Peter were baptized—about 3,000 in all!” (Acts 2:38, 40-41. Living Letters).

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(Note: This incident also supports two other points we have made concerning baptism: They must first repent, or turn from their sin and also be instructed. And they must be “taught”-”Peter preached a long sermon” before they were received into the Church by baptism.)

### **The Baptism of an Individual (Lydia)**

The baptism of Lydia during the missionary visit of Paul and Silas to Macedonia is notable since she was the first recorded convert in Europe. Here again we note that before she was baptized she heard the apostles preaching the Gospel and “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). She not only heard, but she accepted what she heard and acted upon it, and was baptized to symbolize the change in her life.

### **Baptism and the Holy Spirit**

It is to be noted that following Pentecost baptism and the Holy Spirit usually went together. In the majority of instances where it is recorded that the apostles baptized, the Holy Spirit power was received just before or immediately after the baptism. In the case of Lydia whose baptism is reviewed above, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned. However, this is the exception and not the rule. We will consider some of the instances where it is mentioned as accompanying the baptism.

### **The Baptism of Paul**

The conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus is one of the more familiar incidents in the New Testament, so we will omit the details. We are here concerned only with his baptism and the Holy Spirit. His baptism is recorded in Acts 9, verses 17 and 18. Ananias, a faithful disciple, was instructed by Jesus Himself to go to Paul, and he said, “Brother Saul [Paul], the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose, and was baptized.”

Reporting his own baptism Paul quotes Ananias as saying, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). The “washing” was symbolic of putting away all sin, washing away his old sinful past and beginning a new life. It is “the washing of water by the word” that cleanses the Christian, as Paul himself wrote in Ephesians 5:26-27.

### **The Baptism of Cornelius**

An Italian named Cornelius was the first Gentile admitted to the Apostolic Church and baptized by Peter. The Lord had showed Peter in a vision that Gentiles as well as Jews were to be accepted into the church because “*God shows no partiality, But in every nation whoever fears Him, and works righteousness, is accepted by Him*” (Acts 10:34-35).

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In this case, the Holy Spirit was received before the baptism, for we read that “while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (v. 44). Again, note they were instructed before being baptized—they had first to know in order to believe. “Then Peter answered, Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (vs. 46-48). Also note they were baptized “in the name of the Lord.” (The trine baptism, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” does not once appear in the Acts, a fact which leads many Bible students to believe that it was spuriously added to the words of Jesus at a later date by supporters of the doctrine of the Trinity.)

### **Re-baptism in Ephesus**

In Acts 18 and 19 we find an instance where some had received the baptism of John and had not received the Holy Spirit. They had been taught by Apollos, a converted Jew. Paul said to them, “Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. . . . Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them . . .” (Acts 19:1-6).

Note again they were baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” only. (No mention is made of a trine formula.) After being baptized, they received the Holy Spirit.

### **Paul and Baptism**

From the recorded instances in the Acts of the Apostles, it would appear that baptism was in general use in the early days of the Church. But a statement of Paul’s to the Corinthian brethren leads us to believe that he did not consider baptism in water too important. (His words apparently refer to the group mentioned above.)

These are his words: “*I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,...*” 1 Cor. 1:14-17). Christ sent Paul “not to baptize,” but to “preach the gospel.” To preach the Gospel, the knowledge that will save, was of greater importance to Paul than to be baptized in water.

### **BAPTISM FOR TODAY?**

Many denominations of our day lay much stress on the importance of water baptism, but we take the position that water baptism is not necessary or commanded for today. During the Apostolic Age, immersion in water was used as a symbol of the death to sin, being buried in the “water of life,” as taught by Christ. May not the command to baptize have ended when other phases of the same command of

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Christ ended-with the end of the Apostolic or Jewish Age?

### **Why No Water Baptism?**

Water baptism was never sufficient for salvation. It was only an outward form, a symbol of one's intent to change his life. If baptism was not followed by right living, the baptized person would be no more eligible for salvation than the unbaptized one.

The only command found in the Bible concerning baptism is contained in Jesus' words commonly known as the "Great Commission." "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*" (Mark 16:15-18).

From these words of Jesus we learn that baptism and Holy Spirit power went together. To "cast out demons," "speak with new tongues," to "take up serpents" safely, to "drink anything deadly" without being harmed and "to lay hands on the sick" and have them recover required a supernatural power, the power of the Holy Spirit. Without that power the believer would be as powerless to perform miracles as is the Christian believer today. Water baptism was a command for that day, but in view of the Bible teaching concerning the one baptism, is it not reasonable that when the Holy Spirit power ceased, the command to baptize ceased also?

### **The "Great Commission" Fulfilled**

It is commonly accepted that the four Gospels were not written until some time after the events took place. Some 30 years after the time of Christ, Mark is believed to have been the first to have recorded what he had witnessed. The last verse of the book of Mark records the fulfillment of the command quoted above: "*And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word through the accompanying signs*" (Mark 16:20).

Mark had firsthand knowledge of the events since he accompanied the apostles on some missionary trips, perhaps more than are recorded. He was a witness to miracles and had no doubt experienced the Holy Spirit power himself, hence he knew of what he wrote. The "signs" that followed the preaching were the gifts of the Holy Spirit as enumerated above: they could speak in other tongues; they could take up serpents; they could drink poison without harm; they could heal the sick.

No one today is able to perform such miracles. Many claims have been made for casting out devils, speaking in tongues, and healing the sick (especially the latter), but few of these exorcists and divine healers ever dared claim the power to take up serpents or drink poison, thus proving that they were only deceivers, for had they the power to perform miracles they could have performed the whole category of miracles.

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### THE “ONE” BAPTISM

The Bible speaks of two different baptisms:

- 1) the symbolic rite (water baptism)
- 2) the “one” baptism (spiritual)

By far the greater significance and meaning lies in the “one” or spiritual baptism.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, both of whom were numbered among the twelve apostles, came to Jesus with the request that they be granted favored positions in His Kingdom when it is established. Jesus’ answer to their ambitious request reveals the depth of meaning in baptism: “*You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*” (Mark 10:38).

Obviously Jesus meant more than water baptism; anyone could easily undergo water baptism. Jesus was saying to James and John, “Can you bear to go through the experience which I must go through? Can you face being submerged in hatred and pain and death as I must be?” Jesus was telling these two disciples that without a cross there can never be a crown, that baptism is not a simple experience.

Another statement of Jesus’ in Luke 12:50 gives the same impression concerning baptism: “But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed [or pained] I am till it is accomplished!” Jesus uses baptism as above, as of someone passing through a terrible experience. Many newer translations give the thought that Jesus is here referring to the ordeal He faced on the cross-and it is termed a “baptism.”

That Jesus referred to an experience other than water baptism is evident also from what He said further to James and John: “*You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized*” (Mark 10:39). Jesus had been baptized only with the baptism of John and at this time John was already beheaded, hence it would have been impossible for them to undergo the baptism of John.

Just as Jesus had foreknowledge of the painful experience that faced Him, He also knew that His apostles would have to undergo severe persecution after they were left to themselves. History reveals the extent of the horrible treatment the early Church received at the hands of the Romans.

### The Meaning of the “One Baptism”

From Jesus’ own words we learned that it was not a simple dipping in water that He instituted but an immersion. His was not a command to put people into the water and take them out again but to completely submerge them, symbolically, in the water of life until their every thought, word and act is governed by that water described by Jesus as “living water,” the wonderful words of life. This is the “one baptism” to which Paul referred when he said: “*One Lord, one faith, one baptism*” (Eph. 4:5).

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The “*one baptism*” is not water baptism but a baptism of much deeper significance. It entails a full surrender, a complete death to sin. A few verses from Paul to the Romans give us an excellent definition of this all-important baptism: “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin*” (Rom. 6:3-4, 6).

There is no efficacy in water baptism; it does not remove sin. But to be “baptized into his [Christ’s] death,” then to arise to “walk in newness of life” will bring salvation. The “old man” must be crucified, killed, so that sin is no longer our master, “that we should no be slaves to sin.” This constitutes the “one baptism,” the only baptism that will bring salvation.

In the words of a 19th century clergyman, “Christian baptism is no mere literal and senseless dipping assuring the frightened candidate a safe exit from the water, but it is a symbolical immersion, in which the believer goes, in a sublime and solemn trust, into a figurative burial dying to sin for a life with Christ.”

### **The “One Baptism” According to the Prophets**

Although baptism as known since New Testament times is not to be found in the Old Testament, the principle is nevertheless there. The idea of a thorough cleansing, both of person and of character, did not originate with John the Baptist.

Moses’ law contained many and various rules for purification which included putting away sin as well as ceremonial washings. Hezekiah, one of the good kings of Judah, called for a thorough cleansing of the house of the Lord, but before they could partake of the passover they were to sanctify themselves. Sanctification, under the old law, included a cleansing of the person.

Isaiah, speaking for God, commanded: “*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil*” (Isa. 1:16). Jeremiah called on Israel to wash from their wickedness that they might be saved (Jer. 4:14). Ezekiel, prophet of the captivity, declared, “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness, and from all your idols” (36:25). The only water that will cleanse the evil from the heart is the water of life, the Word of God.

These, as well as other Old Testament texts that might be quoted, all point to the cleansing necessary to salvation. It was not a simple washing in water that was required, but a thorough cleansing of the heart, a purging, as in Psalm 51:7: “*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*” To purge suggests something more than a dipping, or a mild cleansing, something much more drastic. Although it was not referred to as a baptism, the process was the same as

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required by the one baptism instituted by Jesus.

### **The “One Baptism” According to Paul**

We have quoted some words from the apostle Paul to define the “one baptism,” but these few verses are not all he had to say on the subject.

Let us read further in the sixth chapter of Romans. In this chapter Paul is emphasizing the difference between a mere outward relationship to Christ and the Church and the “one baptism,” the baptism into Christ’s death to sin. To be “baptized into Jesus Christ” meant something more to Paul than water baptism “in the name of Jesus.” It is to be “baptized into his death,” that is, His death to sin, for as he says in verse 10, “For the death that He died, He died to sin...; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.”

If we have died to sin as Christ died to sin, been baptized into His death to sin, that baptism will cause us to have the same hatred of sin that Christ had. We will so loathe sin that we can no longer live in it. We will be dead to sin in the same way Christ was dead to sin if we are really “baptized into His death.”

By “baptism into His death” Paul could not have referred to immersion in literal water, nor could he have referred to any ritual form of baptism. Likewise the burial in verse 4 could not refer to literal burial. Paul says “We are buried,” but it is not “we” in the entirety of our persons but our “old man” (v. 6), that is, our old nature is symbolically buried. In the words of the clergyman mentioned previously, “The metaphor is to signify the utter death and destruction of the ‘old man,’ its obliteration out of our lives, so that we cannot live any longer in sin nor serve, sin; the apostle represents it as buried, hidden away in a resurrectionless grave. The old man buried, so that the new man may walk unimpeded in ‘newness of life.’ In these words of the apostle we have baptism as expressed by the Greek baptizo, ‘the coming into a new state of life or experience.’”

At a later point in his letter to the Romans, Paul earnestly entreated the brethren in these words: “*Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (12:1). They may have been previously baptized, but that would not save them. It was for them to make a “living sacrifice,” by separating themselves from the world and its evils, becoming servants of God and not servants of sin.

Writing to his son in the faith Timothy, Paul said, “*I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him, If we endure, We shall also reign with him....and, Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity*” (2 Tim. 2:10-12; 19b). Paul had been baptized, but he was willing to suffer, even to the point of death, for the sake of the reward which he knew lay ahead. To be “dead with him [Christ]” is to die to sin as He died to sin, to be “baptized into his

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death,” as Paul wrote in Romans 6:3-6.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul exhorted the Church to be sure their conduct was such that it would be above reproach and to be not afraid of those who opposed them, “For to you it has been granted on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” (1:29-30). Having been baptized into Christ’s death, they could expect suffering and conflict just as Jesus Himself had forewarned the Twelve before His death. This was part of the cup they must drink, the baptism they must be baptized with.

It was not unusual for Paul to warn the brethren through his letters concerning false beliefs and practices. His warning in his letter to the Colossians suggests there may have been false teachers in their midst and he exhorts them to stand fast in the faith, saying, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving....and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power....buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:6-7, 10, 12).

They had been baptized, but there was yet work to do. They must walk in Him, in His commandments, as they had been taught.

The New English translation of verse 12 is a little clearer: “For in baptism you were buried with him, in baptism also you were raised to life with him through your faith in the active power of God who raised him from the dead.” They were symbolically “buried with him” when they were baptized, baptized into His death, and symbolically raised to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4), believing that God who raised Jesus from the dead could likewise raise them from the dead. This constitutes the one baptism.

### **The “One Baptism” in Hebrews**

In the sixth chapter of Hebrews, the writer is exhorting the Jews who had become Christians to progress toward spiritual maturity. “Let us then stop discussing the rudiments of Christianity. We ought not to be laying over again the foundations of faith in God and of repentance from the deadness of our former ways, by instruction about cleansing rites [baptisms, NKJV] and the laying-on-of-hands, about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. Instead, let us advance towards maturity; and so we shall, if God permits” (Heb. 6:2-3, NEB).

They had undergone water baptism and now it was time for them to “advance towards maturity,” towards “perfection” as it is translated in the New King James Version. Baptism in the Apostolic Church was only the beginning, only a foundation stone; they had to work to gain salvation. They had not yet undergone the “one baptism,” the baptism into His death to sin, and the writer was exhorting them to get started.

The writer gives further instruction concerning salvation: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full

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assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:22-23). Their hearts were to be “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience,” according to the Berkeley Bible. Sprinkling with the water of baptism does not cleanse from evil; only the water of life, the Word of God, cleanses from sin. Jesus said, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Hearing the word only is not sufficient. To “go on to perfection” requires acting on the word, keeping the commandments.

The writer to the Hebrews gives testimony to Jesus’ accomplishment of the “one baptism,” in submitting to the cross, advising Christians to look “*unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Heb. 12:2). This was the completion of His “baptism,” His last act of obedience to His heavenly Father. He was “obedient unto death,” praying to His Father, “*if it is your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42). “Not my will, but Yours,” in all things is the Christian’s baptism.

### **The “One Baptism” in Peter**

Peter gives a comprehensive definition of baptism in his First Epistle. Translations other than King James make it clearer. “Baptism is not the washing away of bodily pollution, but the appeal made to God by a good conscience; and it brings salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” 1 Pet. 3:21, NEB). The Berkeley translation is likewise comprehensive: “Baptism saves you, not by removal of physical filth, but by the earnest seeking of a conscience that is clear in God’s presence, which is due to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at God’s right hand.”

Water baptism might remove filth from the body, but that did nothing to cleanse the heart. The rite of baptism was only a symbol; it did not make pure. The heart or mind of man, here spoken of as the “conscience,” can be cleansed only by “earnest seeking,” by learning what God requires and doing it. In this way the “one baptism,” the death to sin, is accomplished.

### **CONCEPTS of BAPTISM**

Like many another Christian belief, baptism has undergone a transition during the nearly twenty centuries that have passed since John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.

The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance, a repentance followed by cleansing the heart according to the words of the prophets (Jer. 4:14; Isa. 1:16), symbolized by immersion in water. John claimed no saving virtue for his baptism; it was only the outward sign of an inward penitence, a turning again to the true God whom the Jews had largely forsaken.

It would seem that Jesus accepted John’s baptism merely as an act of obedience to a divine ordinance, to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). His baptism also served to introduce Him to John’s

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followers and to initiate Him into the ministry.

There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that Jesus Himself baptized; His disciples administered the rite infrequently until after Pentecost. Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 have been interpreted by the majority of Christian denominations as a mandate to baptize all believers. However, a few denominations reject baptism entirely, most notable among these being the Quakers who have "nothing to do with outward forms or ceremonies, rituals or creeds."

Throughout the centuries the rite has become more and more complicated. The earliest rite as pictured in Acts was simple immersion in water in the name of the Lord, usually followed by the laying on of hands, and resulting in the convert's receiving the Holy Spirit. But to the rite were added a variety of details such as the use of the trine formula, trine immersion, a confession of faith, recitation of creeds, sponsors, as well as other minor additions at different periods of church history. The net result, according to a well-known church historian, was that the ritual act itself was given more prominence than the spiritual aspect of washing away the "old man" or the old nature. The change effected by baptism came to be attributed to the "name" and to the water, which were regarded as actually effective and not symbolic. Efficacy was placed in the rite itself and faith on the part of the recipient was regarded as non-essential.

### **Baptism in Post-Scripture Times**

Baptism was a serious matter to the early Church fathers and not to be taken lightly by the laity. The earliest known description of baptism outside the New Testament is found in a document known as the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, commonly spoken of as the Didache. The original manuscript is believed to have been written about the beginning of the second century.

### **Early Church Concepts**

The church fathers were agreed that baptism was essential, but questions arose as to who should baptize and who should be baptized, and when. It had been generally agreed that faith and instruction should precede baptism, but "it should be noted in this connection that it was never supposed that baptism apart from faith would suffice to secure eternal life. Faith was still essential; but whereas faith had as a rule preceded baptism, it was now held that baptism would be equally effective if it preceded faith." (Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, p. 394).

According to a contemporary writer, the Didache "begins with moral instruction, speaking of the two ways of life and of death, and describing the way in which a Christian ought to behave. The early Christians, like the Jews, had a probationary period for would-be converts, during which candidates for baptism were instructed and their lives examined to see if they were worthy to be received into the Church."

The same writer gives us a further description of baptism in an early church (probably Essene)

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from The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, a Roman liturgical document, dated at the beginning of the third century. The description gives us an idea of how seriously the early Christians regarded their religion. (Lorna Brockett, *The Theology of Baptism*, pp. 28, 48) Clement of Alexandria, writing about the middle of the third century after Christ spoke of baptism as “enlightenment, involving rebirth, cleansing and the remission of sins.” He said, “When we are baptized, we are enlightened; being enlightened, we are made sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; and being made perfect, we are made divine....This ceremony is often called a ‘free gift,’ since by it the punishments due to our sins are remitted; ‘enlightenment,’ since by it we behold the holy light of salvation, that is, through it we are enabled to see the divine; we call it ‘perfection,’ needing nothing more; for what more does he need who has the knowledge of God.”

From this quotation it is evident that Clement thought baptism wrought some miraculous change in the individual. Such writings no doubt influenced the people into thinking of the rite of baptism as a cleansing ceremony resulting in sinlessness rather than as an initiation into a life dedicated to obedience to Christ and God. Paganism was already influencing the young Christian Church.

Origen, another prelate who followed Clement in time, was considered to be a “great theologian, philosopher, and mystic, and a prolific writer.” These he may well have been, but he was sadly lacking in a knowledge of the Scriptures. He described baptism as a “new Exodus, and the means by which the convert is set free from the devil.”

Cyril of Jerusalem, a monk who became bishop of Jerusalem about the middle of the fourth century, held that baptism was essential for salvation. His description of the merits of baptism strays far from baptism as known and practiced by the Apostles. He said baptism was “a ransom for captives; the remission of offences; the death of sin; the regeneration of the soul; the garment of light; holy indissoluble seal; the chariot to heaven; the luxury of Paradise; the gift of adoption.” He further stated that the water of baptism “was at once your grave and your mother. In this rite in which we imitate in a figure the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, salvation is brought about not in a figure but in reality.”

With each succeeding century, the Church strayed further and further from the teachings of Christ and the Apostles until the meaning of the rite of baptism was totally lost and the hierarchy of an apostate church became more concerned with ceremony and ritual than with heart-cleansing.

### **Baptism and Exorcism**

About four centuries after the Apostolic Age, exorcism (casting out devils) had been added to the baptismal rite. It appears that this concept flourished for some time. Baptism was believed to “loosen Satan’s hold over the soul.” “Just as the Red Sea drowned the hosts of Pharaoh, so baptism drowns the devil out of a man,” were the words of a bishop of the Catholic Church in this period. According to Hastings’ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, “the insistence on the objective efficacy of the sacrament

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is largely the result of pagan presuppositions.... The close connection of baptism with exorcism and with the renunciation of the devil is derived not from the New Testament, but from the demon environment in which the church was actually living.”

### **Trine Baptism**

During this same period, a trine baptism was being practiced in order to cause those who received it “to reflect on the doctrine of the Trinity.” The invocation was pronounced three times and the candidate immersed three times, one each for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Obviously the true Church conducted no such practice, since the doctrine of the Trinity was not developed until many years after the death of the last apostle.

### **Baptism in the Middle Ages**

According to the historian, the Medieval Church added little to the doctrine of baptism. The Lateran Council of 1216 restated the orthodox view that “baptism does produce a real effect which makes for salvation, even in infants.”

### **Baptism by Sprinkling**

While the Eastern division of the church continued trine immersion, baptism by sprinkling became more and more common from the 13th century on. During the same time, trine immersion disappeared, being replaced by one invocation and one immersion. In England sprinkling did not become common until after the Reformation.

The Council of Trent, held about 1550, defined the subject of baptism, affirming among other things that baptism is necessary to salvation, that the baptized must keep the law of Christ; that the baptized must conform to the teaching of the church and that infants must not be denied baptism because they cannot exercise conscious faith.

### **Baptism and the Reformation**

The reformers’ concepts of baptism differed but little from those of earlier centuries. The Reform Churches held widely separated views concerning the sacrament of baptism, ranging from high esteem by the Lutheran Church and the Church of England to complete rejection by the Quakers.

To Luther, baptism was desirable, but not absolutely necessary to salvation. Calvin maintained that it was necessary to adults but not to infants and young children. The Church of England sided with Luther, affirming that baptism was not absolutely necessary. The majority of Protestants agreed more with the English by rejecting the decree of the Council of Trent. The Baptists, an outgrowth of the Reformation, held that only mature believers should be baptized, emphasizing the necessity of a profession of faith. Most other Protestant churches continued the baptism of infants. By this time exorcism had been removed from the baptismal rite and the procedure greatly simplified. According to

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the historian, baptism had by this time become “a mere symbol or a confession of faith.”

### **Present-Day Concepts of Baptism**

The majority of present-day churches consider baptism as an ordinance instituted by Christ Himself, but this is hardly provable since we have no record that Christ baptized anyone. Christ’s institution of the ordinance rests solely on the words of Matthew 28:19, and as stated previously in the lesson, these words were given as instruction to the eleven disciples and were fulfilled during their lifetime. Today’s views on baptism are not unlike those of the reformation period, varying from those like the Quakers who reject it entirely, to the Roman Catholics, who attach much efficacy to the rite.

“The Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Churches, most Lutheran bodies, and many in the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church, hold that baptism is the direct instrument of regeneration. Roman Catholics subscribe so strongly to this view that, accordingly, they also hold that all persons, adults or infants, who die unbaptized are excluded from heaven. Many evangelical churches believe that baptism is not only the rite of initiation into the church of Christ, but a sign and seal of divine grace symbolizing spiritual cleansing or purification.” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 123).

### **OTHER BAPTISMS**

#### **The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

The first time this phrase is used in the Scriptures is in Matthew 3:11. Jesus had not yet appeared on the scene. These words were spoken by John the Baptist: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

John himself possessed supernatural power and thus would have known of the promise of the Holy Spirit power that was to be given at Pentecost. This power was given in a limited form and for a limited time, but the baptism of which John spoke has a yet future meaning.

Note that John couples this baptism of the Holy Spirit with “fire,” a term used in the Scriptures to denote destruction, most often referring to the judgments of God. When the servants of God have been judged, the faithful will be rewarded with immortality, the baptism of the Holy Spirit; while the unfaithful will be destroyed forever by the “fire” of God’s judgments, eternal death, penal death (Rom. 6:23). Such a baptism will be continuing in accordance with the meaning of the Greek word baptizo.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit as used by Jesus in Acts 1:5 which the disciples were to receive “not many days from now” could refer only to Pentecost. This was truly a baptism in the true sense of the word, bringing the recipients “into a new state of life or experience,” placing them under the control of God so completely that they would be told what they should speak and what they should do by a miraculous means.

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### **Baptism for the Dead**

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:29 have had many and varied explanations. The verse reads: *"Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized, for the dead?"*

This verse has been used in support of paganized beliefs that the living can do something to help those who have died to gain eternal life. Although Paul's words here may be among those *"hard to be understood,"* we are confident he did not intend to convey any meaning that would contradict other plain Bible teachings.

The Scriptures plainly teach that nothing can be done after death or for the dead, "for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Eccl. 9:10); Moses and Samuel might plead our cause, but to no avail (Jer. 15:1); Noah, Daniel and Job might be our advocates, but they could deliver but their own souls by their righteousness (Ezek. 14:14). When we die, our record is closed; by it we stand or fall.

In the New Scofield Reference Bible is a comment on "baptism for the dead" which makes no contradiction with other portions of Scripture. It reads: "Paul is not speaking of baptizing living believers in place of either believers or unbelievers who are now dead. There is no assignment of saving efficacy to baptism. The argument is: Of what value is it for one to trust Christ and be baptized in the ranks left vacant by the believing dead, if there is no resurrection for believers? Why place life in jeopardy and forfeit the benefits of this life, if there is no life after death?"

Paul's argument here is that if there is no resurrection of the dead, the event upon which all future life depends, then our hope is vain and to be "baptized into His death" is futile. Taken in context with the chapter, which is a dissertation on the resurrection, this explanation seems reasonable.

Unger's Bible Dictionary suggests that "the dead" referred to "might be other believers who, by firmness and cheerful hope of resurrection, have given in death a worthy example, by which others were animated to receive baptism.... Christ might also be considered among them, by virtue of whose resurrection all His followers expect to be likewise raised."

### **In Summary**

*"Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* was Peter's command to the assembled throng at Pentecost. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (Matt. 28:19) was the command of Jesus to the eleven after His resurrection.

Do these commands bind us to water baptism today? No, we do not baptize. Not that there would

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be anything wrong with baptism, but we do not believe that the command applies today. It is our conviction that water baptism was a part of the present truth for the Apostolic Age, and that it ceased with the end of that age. Before their death, the apostles had evangelized the then-known world and had fulfilled the command of the master to “*Go...and make disciples of all nations.*”

But the fulfillment of this command in no way nullified the baptism into Christ’s death, the complete death to sin, which we have covered in detail under the heading, “The One Baptism.” This is the baptism alluded to in the words: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

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### STUDY GUIDE

#### Can You Answer These?

1. What is the earliest record of baptism in Scripture? Who performed it? Did this baptism impart salvation?
2. What is the meaning of “baptism”?
3. What was the significance of the apostles’ baptism?
4. Define the “one” (spiritual) baptism. What is its significance?
5. Who was commanded to perform the rite of water baptism?
6. What “signs” followed the apostles’ baptisms?
7. What special feature accompanied literal baptisms? Give three examples of this from Scripture.
8. What is the meaning of “Baptism into death”?
9. Should baptism today be by sprinkling or immersion?

(If you need assistance in answering these questions, refer to your Bible and to the pages of this lesson.)