



Christian Baptism

Berean Series
Bible Studies

BEREAN BIBLE INSTITUTE
19 Ermington Place, Kew,
Melbourne, Australia, 3101.

Christian Baptism

IT is a very great pleasure and privilege to understand and to witness the symbolizing of the consecration of any of our dear brethren in the waters of baptism. There are some Christians who may feel that water baptism is not really necessary, but the example of our dear Lord Jesus is most important to all who delight to walk in His steps, after realizing that He has set a perfect pattern in His words and actions for all His disciples to follow.

As the word "baptism" is not found in the Old Testament, we find that this ceremony applies particularly to the followers of Christ in New Testament times, with one exception. That exception was the baptism which John the Baptist preached and performed in Israel. That was not for Christians, as we find very clearly from the Scriptures. John the Baptist was preaching baptism for six months before our Lord's ministry began, and it is very clear that John was not baptizing for Christian discipleship at all. Our Heavenly Father sent John ahead of Jesus to call Israel to repentance, to prepare the way

for their Messiah who followed six months later. John commenced his ministry at 30 years of age, just as our Lord commenced His ministry at 30 years of age. The opening verses of Matthew 3 read—"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Verses 5 and 6—"Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." That is a key to tell us what John's baptism was all about. John was calling Israel to repentance, to prepare their hearts and minds for their perfect Messiah who was to follow six months later.

Israel had come short of doing their best in regard to the covenant God gave them through Moses, and John's ministry was for the purpose of bringing them back into favor with God who was the Father of Israel. God had given them the Law Covenant since the days of Moses. Now John's mission was very important, to prepare as many as could hear and obey his message of repentance, to receive the Messiah, who would give them, when they

believed into Him, life indeed, life from the dead. So "confessing their sins" was most important, prior to taking the symbol of heart repentance in water, at the hands of John the Baptist.

Christian baptism, however, is not for the purpose of confessing sins, but is a symbol of heart consecration to God. We realize our Lord had no sins to confess at all. Then why did He come to John the Baptist for immersion? We read in Hebrews 7:26—"For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens"—in His wonderful resurrection time. This sinless One came to John the Baptist, who was preaching confession of sins. No wonder John was surprised to have this perfect One coming to him, as we read in Matthew 3:13—"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him." If anyone needed cleansing from sin, it was John himself. Our Lord did not need to explain why He, the perfect One, was coming to take baptism, because John was not invited to become a follower of Christ for the heavenly kingdom. John did not live after Pentecost to become a follower

of the Master. He was sent to prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah, the real Saviour, who only could take away sins. So John's surprise when Jesus came to be immersed in Jordan was understandable. Our Lord was not taking John's baptism. Verse 15—"And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him." John was obedient. He did not know why Jesus desired baptism, and he did not need to know. The Lord was taking the symbol between Himself and His Heavenly Father, to symbolize His death. Jesus knew He had come into the world to give His life for all fallen humanity. Verse 16—"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he (John) saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him." This symbol was particularly for John the Baptist's information, because a little later John introduced this "Lamb of God" to his own disciples. That is why God gave him that wonderful sign, the symbol of a dove, and he heard the voice from heaven, saying—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

God's beloved Son took the symbol of death, showing what had previously taken place with His Heavenly Father in private. This was an outward sign, a symbol of death. In the same way Christians enter into their consecration to their Heavenly Father, committing their lives to Him on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, and the Lord's spirit dwells in their hearts. Then they take the symbol, just as Jesus did, symbolizing what already has taken place in their hearts.

How important it is to keep in mind that we do not rejoice in the symbol particularly, but rather in the reality that God calls true followers of Jesus to Himself to be members of His Little Flock for the heavenly kingdom, and by His holy spirit God keeps them in His care all along their pilgrim way. Jesus took the symbol Himself to show the outward picture indicating the inward condition of His heart.

Our Lord was undoubtedly symbolizing His complete consecration to the Heavenly Father in fulfilment of His mission in coming to earth to pay the death penalty for all mankind. So Jesus symbolized His death, He having presented His perfect

human life to the Father previously, before coming to John to take the symbol in water. The Father's acceptance of Jesus' death baptism, pictured by His immersion in water, was shown by the holy spirit descending in the form of a dove, particularly for John's information.

Our Lord explained His mission in coming to earth in Matthew 20:28—"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He came not to be exalted as a king, to sit upon His throne and be worshipped on earth. He came to minister. He was the sacrificing High Priest, sacrificing His life for $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, pouring out His soul unto death, carrying out His consecration day by day. His sacrifice was a daily one, just as the Christian's sacrifice is a daily one. Each day of the pilgrim way is a day of sacrifice. How important to keep that in mind—every day and every moment we are committed to the Lord, to His service, to perform our duties and privileges as unto Him in spirit and in truth.

We see from Romans 5:19 how the "many" Jesus referred to covers all those condemned to death in Adam, and all saved

out of death through the sacrifice of our Lord.—“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” It is the same “many” in each case. Ransom means a corresponding price. Our Lord condescended to take the sinner’s place as a perfect human being, a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, just as Adam was a little lower than the angels. “Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.” The many condemned to death in Adam, are the same many redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ.

When the time had progressed towards the end of our Lord’s life on earth, we have His words in explanation of His sacrifice in John 12. Certain Greeks came to interview Jesus, saying—“We would see Jesus.” It has been suggested that the Greeks came having heard of the Lord’s miracles, and they thought what a wonderful man He would be to invite to their own country, and perhaps perform miracles there. Verse 23—“Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily,

verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Our Lord is pictured by this corn of wheat. He came to give His life a ransom for many. This invitation could have been a temptation to our Lord to avoid the cross. But no, of course not. Our Lord came to do the Father's will. He delighted to do the Father's will only. That means His sacrifice. For this cause He came into the world, that He might redeem all fallen humanity and bring them back to perfection on the earth. He came also to redeem the Church, who would later assist Him in the blessing of all the families of the earth, as God had promised to Abraham long before—"in thee and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The Plan of God truly gives us a thrill day by day as we think on it, meditate on the outcome and of the favour bestowed upon us, that God should condescend to look upon us and give us the desire to respond! When we have God's prompting in our hearts, do we not thank Him for His drawing us to the Saviour! And when we see our Saviour as the perfect Re-

deemer, what else can we do but yield our hearts to Him through the merit of His sacrifice!—"If so be that we suffer with him, that we might live with him"—and participate in the great uplifting of humanity out of degradation and death to the likeness of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

This lovely Plan in which all Christians rejoice is the only hope for humanity. If the present order of things were to go on and on, how could there be peace and happiness in the world, with each generation coming forth and growing old and dying, who could be really happy? We would be of all men most miserable if that was to be continued forever. Most people do not really think of anything beyond the present life. When people become aged, into the eighties and nineties, it is thought of as a natural thing that they will die. But it is a wrong perception to think that God is taking the good people to heaven, and all others are lost. It is wonderful for us to know that in His Plan, God has provided for the salvation of every human being, because Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man.

So we see in John 12 this grain of wheat, picturing our Lord, falls into the ground and dies, otherwise it would abide alone, but it brings forth much fruit. It brings forth during the Gospel Age the firstfruits unto God—those who have been called of God in this age. This one sacrifice of Christ will also bring forth afterfruits unto God.

Verses 25 and 26 of John 12 describe the calling of God now in this Gospel Age—“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” God is the One who is drawing us to Jesus, God is the One who is taking many sons to glory—the Bride of Christ, the Church of Christ, the Little Flock—that they may be associated with Christ in this glorious heavenly kingdom from which all the obedient of mankind shall receive the restitution blessings on earth provided in God’s Plan.

We recall a lovely incident during our Lord’s ministry when the mother of two disciples came to Him and asked whether

her two sons might be near the Master in the Kingdom. Matthew 20:20-23 tells the story of this devoted mother—"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." They did not need to understand all the details or all the trials ahead of them. Their hearts were with the Lord; they wanted to be with Him in the Kingdom. But God is in charge of the Church, being the Father of the Church. Our dear Lord is the great Head Son. God sent the great Logos to make the sacrifice, and then He brings many sons to glory. The

important work of the Gospel Age is to prepare those who will be associated with Christ in the work of the Kingdom. Jesus no doubt accepted the heart condition of those two disciples, knowing that they would walk in His footsteps and be baptized into His death. No doubt they were kept in His love and care by His power, the same power that keeps us in His love, helps us through difficulties when we commit our lives to God, asking for His help and strength day by day as we progress along the pilgrim way.

Our Lord explained His death baptism also in Luke 12:50, which helps us to see that death baptism is a continuous process.—“I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!” Our Lord was saying that His baptism was in the process of being worked out. He had taken the symbol a year or two previously, but His baptism was still going on, His sacrifice was a daily one. That is required also of each follower of the Master. We have each committed our lives to God’s service, to be laid down in sacrifice as He directs and overrules in harmony with His will.

The two disciples said—"We are able." No doubt they were able, in the same way as declared by the Apostle Paul in Phil. 4:13—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." That is the heart condition for which all Christians are to strive. We can do all things through Christ only. That must be the assured heart intention for each follower of the Master.

The invitation of God to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus is again beautifully shown in Romans 12:1, by the Apostle Paul—"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Just think of the immensity of that invitation—"by the mercies of God"! God could have selected some from the angels to be the Bride of Christ, if that had been His will and plan. But He decided to select from the fallen members of humanity, vessels which can be made unto honour by His spirit. Not many mighty, not many noble are called, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith. What a privilege—what an amazing invitation—when we contemplate it, of presenting our little all

to God, holy and acceptable to Him because of the covering robe of Christ's perfection. Nothing is so reasonable when we understand the great privilege involved. It is not "must I", but "may I" present my body a living sacrifice.

Further, we have the very helpful passage in Rom. 6:3-5 describing our subject. How beautifully Paul outlines full consecration to be dead with Christ-- "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" The Apostle Paul is not speaking here about the symbol at all. He is not speaking about the ceremony of immersion in water. He is speaking of the reality, of being baptised into Christ--into Christ's death. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Isn't that lovely? Planted together sacrificially in the likeness of Christ's death, and being faithful unto death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. So the symbol

of water immersion pictures what has already taken place in the heart. Christians, then, are not baptized into any denomination, not baptized into any form of man-made movement. It is the individual baptism into Christ's death which is symbolized by water immersion. We rejoice with all the Lord's people who have entered into full consecration to God, to be dead with Christ, that they may, by the Lord's grace, ultimately live with Him.

In Revelation 20:4 we have a vision described by John looking back at those who have fully committed their lives to God.—“I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Some of God's people have been literally beheaded, but it does not mean that all faithful Christians are to suffer in this way. They accept Christ as their Head—“Beheaded for the witness of Jesus,

and for the word of God." Those two things are very important in carrying out our consecration vows.

Also in Revelation 14 we have depicted the 144,000 overcomers shown in vision to John with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Verse 4 reads—"These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." The firstfruits are associated with Christ in the wonderful heavenly kingdom, to reign with Christ a thousand years, to bring about the uplifting of fallen humanity out of the death condition, bringing them back to perfection on the restored earth. Those who are with Christ are the spiritual sons of the Father in the glorious kingdom. We rejoice with all dear Christians who, in fulfilling their consecration, walk in the steps of the Saviour, if so be that they may live with Him.

**"Come, Gracious Father, Sun divine!
On these baptismal waters shine,
Thy light, Thy love, Thy life impart,
And fill each consecrated heart.**

**"We love Thy name, we love Thy laws,
And joyfully embrace Thy cause;
We'll bear the cross, the shame, the pain,
With Thy dear Son, for us once slain!**

“We sink beneath the mystic wave,
Nor would we seek our life to save;
We yield our will to Thine own mould,
Nor would we seek our own to hold.

“And as we rise for Thee to live,
O let Thy holy spirit give
The sealing unction from above,
The breath of life, the fire of love.”

The interested reader of this booklet is invited to apply for free samples of the bi-monthly “Peoples Paper”, also other free literature, supplied from —

BEREAN BIBLE INSTITUTE

**19 Ermington Place, Kew,
Melbourne, Vic., Aust., 3101**