

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Doctrine of "Water Baptism "

Baptism is the means by which something or someone is identified with something or someone else. With this identification, the nature or character of the baptized person or thing is changed.

To avoid any confusion or distortion, we need to look at how this ceremonial practice came into being. The English word *baptize*, comes to us from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to dip or immerse. This word was used by ancient Greek poets, dramatists and historians to denote the identification of one object with another, so that the first object is changed. For example, in the fourth century B.C., Xenophon describes how new recruits in the Spartan army dipped their spears into pig's blood before going into battle. By identifying the spears with blood, the nature of the spear was changed from that of a hunter to the spear of a warrior. In some of the ancient secret fraternities, the rite of passage signifying identification with that fraternity was immersion or baptism in blood. In the fifth century B.C., Euripides used the word *baptizo* to describe a sinking ship. As it sinks, the character or nature of the ship is changed and it becomes identified with the water.

There are seven baptisms mentioned in the Bible, four being real identifications with someone or something, and three being rituals with a symbolic meaning. The four real baptisms are *dry*, indicating that no water is used. They are:

1. Baptism with Moses. The children of Israel were identified with Moses and the cloud [a manifestation of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ] as they passed through the Red Sea, **1Co 10:1-2**, *For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;*

2. Baptism with the Cross or Cup. The Lord Jesus Christ is identified with the cross, **Mat 20:22**, *But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."* [See baptism of Jesus Christ below.]

3. Baptism of Fire. This is the baptism of judgment for those who do not believe in the salvation work of Christ on the cross, **Luk 3:16**, John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **2Th 1:7-9**, *when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away*

from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit administers this baptism or identification at the moment anyone believes in the substitutionary spiritual death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Holy Spirit enters the believer into union with Jesus Christ and places the believer positionally at the right hand of God the Father. This position is the basis of having a relationship with God forever. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not an emotional experience; nor is it speaking in tongues. In salvation, our volition is involved only in our decision to accept Christ as Savior.

The three ritual baptisms are those where water is used in a symbolic way to teach a doctrinal lesson or principle. Identification, however, is still the issue. The immersion and the water are real, but the symbolic meaning of the water and what it represents varies depending on the doctrine being taught. The three ritual baptisms are:

1. Baptism by John the Baptist. The water in the Jordan River was symbolic, in that it was a representation of the Kingdom of God about which John preached. The people that came to John, as he stood in the water, entered the water as unbelievers, unsaved and with no hope. Being immersed in the water simply represented being accepted into the Kingdom of God through salvation. John was preaching repentance, which means the changing of one's mind about Christ. Those baptized were being identified with God's kingdom, and they were saying in effect, *I have trusted in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior*. The water itself was used merely as an illustration for those being newly identified with the Kingdom of God. By using their free will to accept Christ as personal Savior, they came out of the water as believers in the salvation work of the cross, **Mat 3:6, 3:11**, *And they were being baptized [identified with the kingdom of God through salvation] by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance [change of mind toward Christ], but He [Jesus Christ] Who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

2. Baptism of Jesus. Again, water was used to illustrate a doctrine that was to be learned. What made this baptism unique is that Jesus Christ was not a sinner. Therefore, the water was symbolic not of salvation and the kingdom of God, but rather of God the Father's will. Jesus Christ identified Himself with the Father's will by His execution of Phase One - going to the cross and providing our so great salvation, **Mat 3:13-17**, *Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan [coming] to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit [it] at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he [John the Baptist] saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove [and] lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."* Jesus' immersion into the water symbolized Our Lord's obedience to the Father's plan for

His first advent, a plan that no one but the impeccable Lord Jesus Christ could execute. No matter what certain religious sects may teach, we as believers cannot 'follow the Lord in baptism'.

3. Baptism of the Believer in the Church-age. As the writers of New Testament Scripture were inspired, through the filling of the Holy Spirit, to write down God's exact and direct will for mankind [mystery doctrine of the Church-age], Bible doctrine was also taught verbally all over the ancient world between 30 A.D. and 96 A.D. The Bible at that time had not yet been completed, so pastor-teachers taught from either the doctrines that they had heard verbally, or from written doctrines they had received in the form of a letter. These pastor-teachers found out that in the art of teaching, one must communicate what one knows in a manner understandable to those being taught. This method of communication requires illustrations and examples.

Water was found to be a great illustration in identifying and understanding a point of doctrine. The Lord Jesus Christ understood this principle when He spoke to His disciples, **Mat 28:18-19**, *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them [teaching believers by illustration and identification] in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

The Lord instructed His disciples to go out into the world and spread the good news of salvation, and then teach the doctrines related to salvation to these new believers by using water as an analogy or illustration. This is shown in **Act 8:26-39**, *But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert [road].) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture that he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation, His judgment was taken away; who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth." The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please [tell me], of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized [taught by illustration and identification] him [with the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ]. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.*

Water baptism was an illustration, a teaching aide, a picture of the real baptism of the Holy Spirit, which had taken place at the precise moment the Ethiopian eunuch believed in the substitutionary salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was not, and is not, a requirement for salvation. Water was used, prior to the canon of Scripture being complete, to illustrate the doctrine of being identified with Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. The Ethiopian eunuch being baptized was already a believer. He had already accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, and he was already saved. Philip was teaching a doctrinal principle to a believer, not to an unbeliever. An unbeliever cannot understand spiritual things, **1Co 2:14**, *But a natural man [unbeliever] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

When the Ethiopian eunuch entered the water, Philip was teaching the fact that he had been identified with Jesus Christ in His death and that he was rejecting human good. Each and every sin of the human race was judged on the cross. So, any and all human effort and good works used by man in an attempt to achieve salvation or spirituality is rejected by God. There is only one way into the kingdom of God, **Joh 14:6**, *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."* No work or effort on the part of mankind to achieve salvation has ever been, or will ever be, part of the Pre-designed Plan of God, **Eph 2:8-9**, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

God can only accept what is His, **Mat 22:21**, *Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."*

God's perfect righteousness can only accept what is perfect, and the best works of mankind, no matter how perfect we may think they are, are nothing but filthy rags in the sight of God, **Isa 64:6**, *For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment*

Part of baptism, or identification with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, is that the believer has already been taught and understands that any and all human good is rejected and dead, not only as a way to salvation but also as a means of achieving spirituality. This is also known as retroactive positional truth, which is victory over human good or death to self.

As the Ethiopian came up out of the water, he was baptized or identified with the air, which represented the resurrection, ascension and session of Jesus Christ as He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. The Ethiopian was taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation put him positionally with the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father. This is known as current positional truth. From this position, the believer realizes that security in his relationship with the one and only true God will last forever, **Joh 10:28-29**, *"And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given [them] to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch [them] out of the Father's hand."*

Being positionally with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Ethiopian eunuch had the basis for being

filled with the Holy Spirit and subsequently producing Divine good from inside the Pre-designed Plan of God. Divine good is the fruit that is automatically produced by the believer who is thinking Bible doctrine and applying it to his life within God's Pre-designed Plan.

In conclusion, the purpose of water baptism was to teach by illustration the following doctrines:

- a. The believer is identified with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection;
- b. The believer has victory over, and rejects, human good;
- c. The believer is positionally seated with Jesus Christ at the right hand of God the Father; and
- d. The believer must have a clear understanding of how to produce Divine good from within the Pre-designed Plan of God.

Water baptism was never intended to be a means of salvation. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, with nothing added to it. Nor was water baptism intended to be a means of spirituality. It was never anything more than a teaching aide - a way of illustrating the doctrines related to being identified with the death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.