

BAPTISM: TRUTH vs TRADITION

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:” — 1 Peter 2:21

Shortly *after* Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, he told his disciples: *“I have a baptism to be baptized with...”* (Luke 12:50). Jesus was not referring to his water baptism by John, but to his *mission* which would consume him daily for three and a half years. *This* baptism was a sacrificial journey which would end with his death upon the cross, when he cried — *“It is finished!”*

Christians are in agreement that the New Testament teaches baptism for Jesus’ followers. And while united in this fact, there is significant diversity of thought respecting its method and meaning. Now, in this *time of the end*, Christians are enabled through Bible study tools to learn the truth on this beautiful, but often misunderstood picture of true Christian baptism.

Although for the Christian there is but ONE baptism, it might surprise some to know that there are seven different baptisms mentioned in Scripture:

- 1) Baptism into Moses and the Cloud,
- 2) John’s Baptism, 3) Baptism of Jesus by John, 4) Baptism by Fire, 5) Baptism into Christ’s Death, 6) Baptism of the Spirit, and 7) Baptism for the Dead.

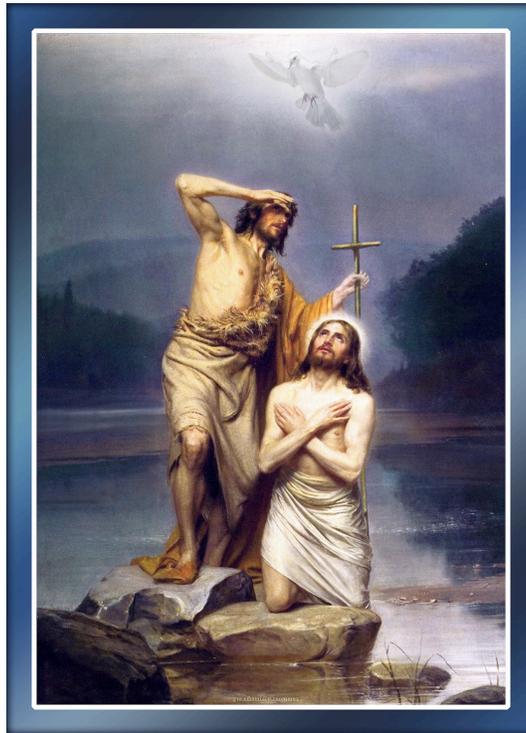
Understanding the function and purpose of these seven different baptisms will help us to appreciate more the sacrificial life of Christ and how our own baptism relates to his.

1. BAPTISM INTO MOSES AND THE CLOUD

The various ceremonies of the Law of Moses stipulated nothing respecting baptism for the Jews; however, the Apostle Paul alluded to their baptism when he expressed: *“They were all baptized unto Moses in the sea and in the cloud.”* (1 Corinthians 10:2) Passing through the Red Sea in Israel’s exodus from Egypt, they soon entered into a covenant relationship with God at the base of Mount Sinai. Traveling through the Red Sea symbolically represented Israel’s baptism as a Nation.

As the mediator between God and the Nation of Israel, Moses proclaimed: *“A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from amongst your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.”* (Deuteronomy 18:15,18; Acts 3:22) Under God’s arrangement with the Hebrew people, whoever remained faithful under the Law Covenant would be ready to recognize and accept

Jesus as their Messiah — the *better Mediator*. (Hebrews 12:24) When Jesus came unto his people, to every Jew of faith already in covenant relationship with God, it was but a small step to transfer from the Law Covenant and into Christ.



2. JOHN’S BAPTISM

When John the Baptist began to preach, his intended mission was to prepare the Jews, as a Nation, for their coming Messiah. He prophesied that the Kingdom was imminent, and that the Hebrew people would need to be in a condition of heart-readiness if they would receive God’s blessing through their Messiah. John’s preaching attracted only those Jews who exercised faith in their promises. His baptism was for these Jews only — individuals who were seeking to renew their covenant commitment to God. John’s baptism, therefore, *symbolized* repentance and cleansing from violations of the Law Covenant — restoring them to harmony with God.

The Apostle Paul referred to these faithful Jews as *natural branches in the*

olive tree — the original Promise given to Abraham. (Romans 11:16-21) But, sadly, Jesus *“...came unto his own [Israel], and his own received him not; but to as many as received him, to them gave he liberty to become the sons of God...”* (John 1:11, 12) Those individual, faithful few who repented and *received him*, Jesus called *“Israelites indeed.”* (See John 1:43-51.) Israel as a Nation, however, rejected their Messiah. Thus, five days before his crucifixion, Jesus declared the Nation of Israel *desolate*. *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”* Matthew 23:37, 38

This *desolation*, the removal of God’s favor *for a time* from the Nation of Israel, began in A.D. 36 — three and a half years after Jesus’ death. The Jewish Age then transitioned into the Christian Age. But, up to this point in time, the Jewish people alone had been given the privilege of passing by faith into Christ — from the *“house of servants”* into the *“house of sons.”* Hebrews 3:5

3. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS BY JOHN

Jesus himself marked the beginning of this transition point from the Jewish to the Christian Age. Immediately upon reaching the age of thirty, the age of manhood under the Law, Jesus made a complete consecration of himself — a full sacrifice of his life. As a perfect man, he could have lived on forever as a man, but Jesus gave up his rights of perfect manhood so that he might do his Father's will only. (Psalm 40:7,8; Hebrews 10:7) Thus, consecrating himself to his Father, Jesus came to be baptized of John at the Jordan River. (Matthew 3:13) Jesus was thereby teaching that his outward baptism symbolized the voluntary surrender of his earthly life.

John the Baptist tried to dissuade Jesus from being baptized saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matthew 3:14) John observed that Jesus had no need to repent of sin, nor infractions against the Law of Moses. But Jesus comforted John: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Matthew 3:15

"And Jesus... went up straightway out of the water... [note — he was not sprinkled] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove..." (Matthew 3:16,17) This symbol of a dove indicated that God *begat* his precious Son to a new nature — a spiritual life. When John brought Jesus up from the water, this symbolically represented the beginning of the *New Creation* — starting with Jesus as the *head* of the Church. Jesus wished to provide his faithful an example, and each member of his *body* was to "follow in his steps" — beginning with heart consecration to do the Father's will — followed by the outward *symbol* of baptism.

4. BAPTISM BY FIRE

Just before Jesus' baptism, John exclaimed: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me... shall baptize you with the holy Spirit, **and with fire**: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:11, 12) John was prophetically pointing to the *fire of God's anger* that would come upon the Hebrew Nation which rejected His Son. (1 Thessalonians 2:16) There was indeed a *baptism of fire* — a destruction of their national existence by the Romans in the end of the Jewish Age. Jesus indicated that the "chaff" of that Nation pictured a similar "fire" upon the "tare" class of Christendom — false Christians — in the Harvest of this Gospel Age. This *baptism by fire* will be "a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation." Daniel 12:1

Sadly, some Christians misunderstand this text and even pray for a *baptism by fire*. It is important *not* to mistake the *baptism by fire* for another form of Christian baptism, nor to equate it with the Pentecostal manifestation of the holy Spirit — *cloven tongues of fire*. Acts 2:3

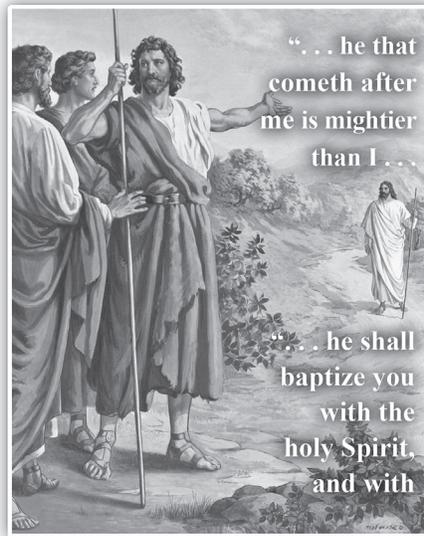
5. BAPTISM INTO CHRIST'S DEATH

"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ...if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Romans 6:3-5) This *baptism into death* begins at the moment of our full surrender to the will of God — consecrating

our all to follow and obey Him, even unto death. (Revelation 2:10) The point at which God accepts our sincere consecration is when we are counted as prospective members of *the body of Christ* — Jesus being our Head. 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22, 23

Our wills — our minds — control our bodies, brains, time, talents, influence and possessions. There is not a thing of value that we possess which does not properly come under the control of the will. Hence, when we surrender our wills, we give our ALL to God in Christ. Those who make a full consecration of their lives become joint-sacrificers with Jesus in the service of the Truth.

This burial or *immersion* of our human will into the will of Christ means our *symbolic* death as human beings. "Ye are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3) This burial of our wills is then followed by our *begetting to newness of life* — to a new, spirit nature, as *New Creatures in Christ Jesus* — with the prospect of a spiritual resurrection. Following in his footsteps, we take up our cross to follow him in the death of self-will and the life of the *new mind* and will. "...if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him..." 2 Timothy 2:11, 12; Romans 6:3-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17



6. BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

"As the body is one, and hath many members...so also is Christ. By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..." (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13) There is a difference between *baptism into Christ's death* and the *baptism of the spirit*. The *baptism into Christ's death* is an

individual decision, in which each who would become a member of the body of Christ must *individually* consecrate — sacrifice his will to God in Christ. By contrast, the *baptism of the holy Spirit* refers to the ONE baptism for the *entire* Church — starting with Jesus. Like the anointing oil poured upon the head of the High Priest in the Tabernacle, the holy Spirit flows down from Jesus — the head of the Church — to his body members. (Psalm 133:2) This *baptism of the Spirit* continued with the anointing of the Jews assembled at Pentecost, then onto Cornelius, the first Gentile convert. With the rejection of the Hebrew Nation, the way of faith was open to the Gentiles who had been without a relationship with God. Gentiles, as the Apostle explained, were *wild olive branches*, and would be ingrafted into the places left vacant by the breaking off of the "natural branches" of the original olive tree. Thus, it is as *individual believers* — whether Jew or Gentile — that we are baptized into Christ's death — it is as *members together* of the one body of Christ that we join the anointing of the holy Spirit and are constituted his Church.

7. BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

"Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?" (1 Corinthians 15:29) During the Dark Ages, a misunderstanding of this text led to the *false practice* of *substitutionary baptism*. It was thought that a Christian could not only be baptized for him or herself, but could also be baptized for someone else who had died before baptism. Having clarified the thought of Christian baptism — that of symbolizing *heart consecration* to God — it is now easy to see that being baptized by proxy for someone else is impossible.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul was defending the doctrine of the resurrection — if Christ is not risen, then faith in the Gospel is in vain, for it would mean that all who have died have perished forever. Thus, baptism **for the dead** actually means that Jesus and his followers are baptized **for the purpose** of raising and rehabilitating the dead world of mankind. Paul knew that Christ and his Church were to bring the dead back from their graves, and so why be “*baptized into his death*” — a death he died for ALL mankind — if the dead be not raised? Christ was the first to be raised from death and his faithful Church would be next. And then, Christ with these faithful — head and body together — will raise the world of mankind from their graves. 1 Corinthians 15:21-23; Revelation 21:1-4; 22:17

THE SYMBOLISM OF WATER BAPTISM

Referring back to Romans 6, notice that there is no mention of immersion into water. *Baptism into Christ's death* is the **real** baptism for his faithful followers. Water baptism is only the *symbol*, as it was to Jesus. All who receive this **true** baptism in full consecration are to be considered as members of the Church. The beautiful symbol of water baptism is shown by the new believer being immersed under the water, in full submission, as in death. This symbolizes the death to self-will and rising again to newness of life by the grace and strength of our Lord. Our water baptism is the public confession of our heart commitment. Note the following definitions of baptism:

- *The Strong's Concordance*: “...to immerse, submerge; to make *whelmed* (i.e. Fully wet)...”
- Dr. Philip Schaff, Presbyterian: “*Immersion, and not sprinkling, was unquestionably the original, normal form. This is shown by the very meaning of the Greek words baptizo, baptisma, baptismos.*” *History of the Apostolic Church*, p. 568
- Martin Luther, Lutheran: “*Baptism is a Greek word, and may be translated ‘immersion.’*” “*I would have those who are to be baptized to be altogether dipped into the water.*” *Luther's Works*, Vol. I, p. 336
- John Wesley, Methodist: “*Buried with him by baptism*”—*alluding to the ancient method of immersion.*”



By their own example, Jesus and the Apostles clearly taught symbolic water baptism: “*Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name [by the authority] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 28:19, 20) It was granted to the Apostles and to all faithful teachers to instruct new believers respecting the grace of God in Christ, their justification through faith, and to be dead to self-will. Thus, water baptism — full immersion in water — is symbolic of the burial of the “*old man.*” (Romans 6:6) It is the outward sign by which the inward, heart-consecration would be a witness to those observing their baptism. The Apostles urged upon new believers to full consecration of heart, saying, “*I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service.*” (Romans 12:1) This was the invitation to consecrate, to sacrifice, to be “*baptized into his death.*” As evidence of the importance of water baptism, see Acts 8:12, 35-38; 10:44-48; 18:8; 16:14,15, 33.

FORMALISM LED TO CONFUSION

A few short centuries after the Apostles fell asleep in death, superstitious views respecting the act of baptism were erroneously injected into doctrine. It was no longer a **symbol** to represent the full submission of one's will to the will of God, but the formal **act** of baptism was thought to cancel past sins and guarantee entrance to heaven. It was then claimed that if an individual did not perform the **act** of baptism, their hope of salvation would be lost forever.

Confusion on this subject led believers to seek baptism for their children — trusting in the formal **act** and not the **free-will** and **faith** of the believer. Because young children are incapable of sacrifice — heart consecration to the will of God — a further perversion of the intent was fabricated by which “*god-parents*” might become sponsors for children.

Over the decades, formalism continued to increase: special *holy-water* fonts were built; elaborate vows were taken; officiating priests exorcised the believer of devils; etc. Many such mistaken views of baptism still hold some denominations in superstitious bondage to ceremonies which are believed to have mystical powers. These were never authorized by Scripture.

Surrendering one's will to God must be a personal choice — something about which billions have never known. It is reassuring to know that Jesus “*gave himself a ransom for all [including those who were never baptized] to be testified in due time.*” (1 Timothy 2:6) In this *due time*, all will come forth from their graves to learn of the life Jesus gave for the life of the world. Then, all will come to know him, from the least to the greatest! Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 4:10; Jeremiah 31:34

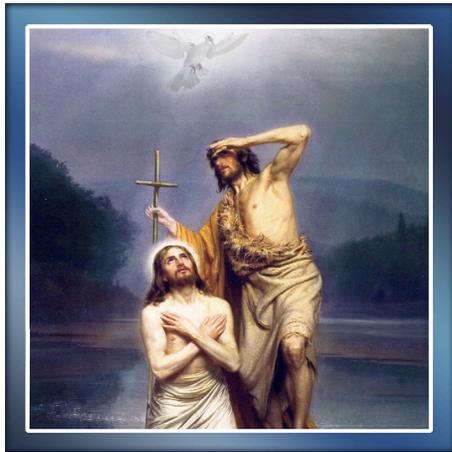
“**MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN.**” — Matthew 22:14

Many hear the *call* of discipleship and begin to search the Scriptures, but few enter upon this narrow path. “*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*” (Matthew 7:14) These are now *prospective* adopted sons of God. These *chosen* now seek with diligence the will of God in His holy Word. With the guidance of God's spirit through able teachers, these *chosen* begin to understand the deeper things of God: “*The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and he will shew them His covenant.*” Psalm 25:14; John 16:13

As the newly consecrated progress, they also gain more insight into the purpose of being baptized into Christ's death: “*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*” (Philippians 1:29) Following the steps of Jesus Christ means to walk as he did from his baptism at the Jordan River until he died on the cross at Calvary. This is *the baptism* to which Jesus now calls us: “*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*” Matthew 16:24

Having consecrated our ALL to God, having shown publicly, by the *water symbol*, what is in our hearts, we now continue on in fullness of faith and a life of *sanctification* — separation from worldly influences, the sinful tendencies and the allurements of Satan. Those who remain faithful to their covenant with the Father receive the eternal crown of life. “*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” Revelation 2:10

BAPTISM: TRUTH VS TRADITION



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