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SPIRIT OF LIFE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
BIBLE SCHOOL THIRD EDITION
SESSION 11: THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRIST PART 5
THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMS

Hebrews 6:1-3: *1Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, 2of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.3 and this will we do, if God permit.”*

A baptism is a transition—out of an old way of life and an old way of living into a totally new way of living. It is a total immersion; Our entire being is involved.

Let’s look again at the Scripture passage we are studying in the New King James Version:

NKJV: *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles [or basic truths] of Christ, let us go on to perfection [completion, maturity], not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.* **Hebrews 6:1–2**

The “doctrine” of baptisms simply means “teaching about” baptisms. Notice that the word baptism is plural: baptisms. There are actually three different baptisms mentioned in the New Testament, each of which we will study in due course.

These baptisms are:

1. John’s baptism, the baptism of John the Baptist.
2. Christian baptism, which is not the same as John’s baptism; and number three,
3. The baptism in the Holy Spirit.

These are three distinct baptisms, all of which play an important part in the New Testament.

To Baptize—A Transition. The word baptize is not really an English word, but a Greek word written in English letters. Technically, it is a transliteration. The word is taken directly from the Greek word, *baptizo*, which is not translated but just written in English letters. There are various possibilities as to why this word was transliterated rather than being translated according to its true meaning.

It may be just church tradition, or it could be that the translators of the King James Version did not want to offend the Anglican Church by using the exact meaning of the word. I am not asserting any particular position.

However, if we go back to the Greek, there is absolutely no question about the correct meaning of the word. It means “to immerse.” It comes from a root word, *bapto*, which means “to dip.”

Immersion can take place in one of two ways, and both of them are relevant to the New Testament. You can immerse something in water by putting it down into the water so that it is fully covered, or you can immerse something by pouring water over it. But whichever way you do it, it is total immersion, not partial. Therefore, when we think of a baptism in the New Testament, we must think of it as a *total immersion*.

Every kind of baptism spoken of in the New Testament represents a complete transition. We move out of one place into another. Our whole person moves, not just part of us. For that reason, I need to emphasize that baptism is total immersion. Our total being is affected by this process of baptism.

In or Into What?

The word baptism is used with two or three different prepositions which need to be explained. Baptize is used with the preposition in or into, or sometimes just to.

The preposition “in” refers to the element in which you are immersed. It may be water, or it may be the Holy Spirit. When “into” is used, it describes the end product, or result, of being immersed. It is what we pass into as a result of the transition of baptism.

For instance, John the Baptist’s baptism was in water into repentance, or forgiveness of sins. There is both an “in” and an “into.” The baptism in the Holy Spirit is in the Spirit and into the body of Jesus Christ.

In considering baptism we need to ask these two questions:

1. What is it in?
2. And, what is it into?

To make this clearer, and to further clarify similarities among the different baptisms in the New Testament, we will refer to the following table.

Note that each baptism—John’s baptism, Christian (or water) baptism, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit—are each listed in the left-hand column. Across the top of the table are the requirements for receiving that baptism, the element in which the baptism takes place, and finally, the state or position into which one is baptized. The specifics of each baptism will be made clearer as we progress.

NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISMS

BAPTISM	REQUIREMENTS TO RECEIVE	ELEMENT OF OR IN	NEW POSITION OR STATE (INTO)
JOHN THE BAPTIST	REPENTANCE EVIDENCE OF REPENTANCE	WATER	FORGIVENESS OF SINS
CHRISTIAN WATER BAPTISM	HEAR THE GOSPEL REPENT BELIEVE GOOD CONSCIENCE	WATER	CHRIST NEWNESS OF LIFE
HOLY SPIRIT	REPENT BE BAPTIZED BE THIRSTY COME TO JESUS ASK RECEIVE/DRINK YIELD	HOLY SPIRIT	BODY OF CHRIST

1. John’s Baptism

John the Baptist got his name from the fact that he was the baptizer. We read in the gospel of Mark: **Mark 1:2–4** *“As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare ye the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.’” John did baptize in the wilderness and preach a baptism of repentance for [or into] the remission of sins.”*

The ministry of John the Baptist was to go before the Messiah and prepare His way. His message was very simple. It could be summed up in one word: **repent**. Verse four should be translated, *“into the remission of sins.”* People were being baptized with a baptism of repentance that led to the remission (or forgiveness) of their sins. Please note this in the table above: “Baptized **in** water,” “*into* the forgiveness of sins.”

The purpose of John's baptism was to prepare the way for the coming of Israel's long-awaited Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. It is very significant that Jesus could not come—God would not release Him to come—until the hearts of God's people had been prepared by repentance. I am inclined to think that the same is true of the coming again of Jesus. The hearts of God's people will have to be prepared by repentance. In some ways, repentance is the most crucial single message that God's people need today.

An Important Link

John's ministry was also a very important link between two different periods of God's dealings with His people, or two different dispensations. A "dispensation" is a given period of time in which God relates to His people according to certain principles that He Himself sets in place. John was a link between the dispensation of the Law and the Prophets, which began with Moses; and the dispensation of grace and the gospel, which came with Jesus. John is a crucial figure in the unfolding of God's whole purpose, and he stands as a link between these two distinctly different periods of history.

Speaking about John in **Matthew 11:13**, Jesus says: ***"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."***

John the Baptist marked the end of the dispensation of the Law. As such, he was a transitional link to the new dispensation of the grace of the gospel. That makes him an important man. In a sense, he bisected the history of God's people. He ended one period and initiated another. We know relatively little about John, and I have been inclined to underestimate the importance of his ministry. His ministry was brief, but it was crucial because it prepared the way for Jesus. His impact on the people of Israel was tremendous.

Mark 1:5 ***"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."***

John's Impact

In a very brief period of time, John doubtless reached hundreds of thousands of people—the whole population of Jerusalem, Judea, and much of the surrounding area beyond. I often reflect on the unique way God does things. He does not hire a committee, rent a stadium, organize a choir, and say, "Now we'll have a meeting." He accomplishes His purposes in the most improbable ways. In this case, He called just one man, dressed in a garment of camel's hair, who went out into the wilderness, and all the people went out to him.

The people were brought out to John, not by organization, not by advertisement nor by publicity, but by the supernatural moving of God. That tends to be the way God does things—in an unexpected way.

We need the same today. Where the fire of God is burning, people will go. It doesn't matter what kind of a place it is. It doesn't matter what type of personality the preacher has or whether he is educated or uneducated. It only matters that God is there.

As far as we know, John the Baptist had no formal education, but he was a man set on fire by God. Jesus said later to the people of His day, (John 5:35) ***“He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.”***

Unfortunately, those people to whom Jesus was speaking never caught the fire. They went to the light, they received the benefit of the light, but they never caught the fire. Jesus' commendation of John is very powerful: ***“He was a burning and a shining light.”*** It is true scientifically that if you want to shine, you have to burn. There is no light without heat. Let's take that to heart. If we are going to shine for Jesus, we have to burn. Let's pray that, wherever God puts us, we will be a burning and a shining light.

Requirements of John's Baptism

John's baptism required three actions on the part of the people who came to be baptized.

First, it was *a baptism of repentance*. Therefore, those desiring to receive his baptism needed to repent. Repentance, you will remember from our earlier studies, is not an emotion but a decision. It is coming to the end of something, turning around to face the opposite way, and going in the opposite direction. John demanded that those who came to him for baptism would meet that condition of repentance. It was, first, a *decision, and then an action*.

Second, John demanded the *public confession of sins*. This seems to have dropped out of the thinking of so many people in the church today. I have learned by observation that it is extremely powerful when God's people are sufficiently convinced by the Holy Spirit to confess their sins. It has been the key that sparked various revivals in the past, especially the Welsh Revival in 1904, which was marked by people confessing their sins.

You do not necessarily have to confess your sins in public, but you do have to confess your sins. The only sins God is committed to forgive are the *sins we confess*. The disciple John says in his first epistle: ***1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***

That sentence starts with a little word, “if.” *If* we confess our sins. If we do not confess, we have no guarantee that God will forgive. Many believers have a pile of unconfessed sin behind them. They come for healing or for a blessing and wonder why they do not receive it. They have a tremendous burden. David said his sins were “like a heavy burden” to him (**Psalm 38:4**).

Dear friend, you may be hearing this with a heavy burden over you because you have piled up sins that you have not yet confessed. You would do well to get alone with God, open your heart to the Holy Spirit and say, “God, show me what I need to confess.” Remember, if you do not confess, you have no guarantee that God will forgive. If we confess, He will forgive.

The **third** demand of John the Baptist was evidence of a changed life. He required evidence that people had repented. When people came to him who apparently had not repented because they did not show the visible evidence of their repentance, John refused to baptize them (**Matthew 3:8**).

In particular, those were the religious people of the day—the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Jesus later pointed this out to the Pharisees, by saying, **“Tax collectors [publicans] and harlots believed John and you didn’t. They will go into the kingdom of heaven before you.”** (See **Matthew 21:31–32**. NKJV) It is very hard for strongly religious people to come to grips with a new move of God. One may often express it this way: When a new move comes in the church, another story is added to the building. Then, generally speaking, those who are part of that move put the roof on what they believe God will do by saying, “This is it; no more.” Then the next time the wind of God moves, the first thing He has to do is blow their roof off!

People who have identified with a particular move of God tend to be rather resentful and find it hard to move with what God desires to do next. This is just like the Pharisees, and John was a very plainspoken man when he confronted them about it.

People of Plain Speech

A man once made a little study of the characteristics of people of whom the New Testament said, “They were full of the Holy Spirit.” The first one mentioned was John the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. The others were Jesus, Peter, Paul, and Stephen. He made the rather frightening discovery that most of them ended their lives as martyrs.

He also discovered that they were all people of plain speech. They did not use nice, religious language. The Holy Spirit cannot endorse anything that is flimsy, muddled, or unclear. He wants plain, clear speech. What John said a lot of preachers would never say today.

For instance: **Matthew 3:7–9**, “But when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, *Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance [or answerable to a change of life], and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise children to Abraham from these stones.*” That is an amazing statement! We cannot rely on our pedigree or on our background. We each have to meet God’s conditions personally.

Those were the three requirements of John’s baptism: repentance, public confession of sins, and evidence of a changed life.

I want to point out something else here, because it applies in every place where the word baptism is used. It says that John baptized them **into** repentance. (See “New Testament Baptisms” chart, page 3.) But remember that he would not baptize them unless they had already repented. Baptism did not produce the repentance—it was the seal and evidence that they had already repented. You will find this accurate in every place in which the phrase “baptized into” is used. It does not indicate that the baptism brought them in, but it is used to indicate that the baptism is the seal upon their entrance into that particular state or condition.

Limitations of John’s Baptism

The baptism of John only took people a certain distance, therefore it had certain limitations.

First of all, it did not produce the new birth. Jesus says of John the Baptist: **Matthew 11:11** “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

This indicates John was born “of women,” but he was never born again in the New Testament sense. He did not enter into the new birth [“the kingdom of heaven”] because that was not possible until Jesus was resurrected. He was one of the greatest of those born of women, but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John.

We are not greater because of what we are, but because of where God has put us in Christ. God has brought us into the kingdom through the new birth. Remember that Jesus said, “**Unless one is born again, he cannot see [or enter] the kingdom of God**” (**John 3:3, 5**). So, John had his God-given limitations.

Second (and this is very important), after Pentecost, the baptism of John was no longer accepted as valid. This is revealed in **Acts 19**.

Acts 19:1–2 *“And it came to pass that , while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus. And finding certain disciples he said to them, “Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?”*

Notice that we are not told of what or of whom they were disciples. Apparently, Paul was not clear himself when he met them. Therefore, he asked a question which, I imagine, he asked everywhere he went: *“Did you receive the Holy Ghost since you believed?”* This proves that it is possible to believe without receiving the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul made a discovery: **verses 2–3** They said to him, *“We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”* And he said to them, *“Into what then were you baptized?”* So, they said, *“Into John’s baptism.”*

There are different ways of understanding this. When they said, “We have not heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” why did Paul say, *“Unto what then were you baptized?”* Why did Paul use the word **then**? How is it possible they could have been disciples without hearing about the Holy Spirit? One explanation is that Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 28** they should be baptized *“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (verse 19). If they had experienced that baptism, they would have heard of the Holy Spirit. It was then that Paul realized they were never baptized as believers in Jesus. Rather, they had only been baptized with the baptism of John.

Paul continues: **Acts 19:4** *“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”* Paul is telling them that John’s baptism was a preparatory baptism. But now that Jesus had come, had died, and had risen again, it was no longer sufficient. **verses 5–6** *“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 Ghost came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.”*

Paul was thorough. He did not accept anything that was superficial. He wanted to make sure they were true believers in Jesus. They were baptized in water, and after they were baptized in water, Paul laid his hands upon them. Then, as a distinct experience, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues and prophesied.

These verses set the limits to the baptism of John the Baptist. It did not lead people into a new birth experience, and it was not sufficient to receive the Holy Spirit.

Christian Baptism

Christian baptism covers what it means to be baptized as a believer in Jesus. I would have to say that this is far more important than the average Christian today realizes. Even the Baptists, who believe very strongly in the need for baptism, generally speaking have very little understanding of the true significance and importance of being baptized in water.

Let me make it clear. First, *you are not baptized into Jesus Christ because you are a sinner.* This is not a baptism of repentance. We see this from Jesus' baptism.

Matthew 3:13–14 *“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. ¹⁴But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?”*

At that moment, John did not know that Jesus was the Messiah. In the gospel of John, it says that John the Baptist did not know Jesus until the Spirit of God descended upon Him and remained on Him. (See **John 1:33–34**.) That is a testimony to the life of Jesus. Even though John did not know He was the Messiah, he still said to Jesus: *“You are more righteous than I am; I should not be the one to baptize You.”*

Matthew 3:15–17 *“¹⁵And Jesus answering said unto him, suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. ¹⁶And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: ¹⁷And lo a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”*

In John's gospel it says the dove descended and remained upon Jesus (**John 1:32**). It is impossible to overemphasize the importance the New Testament attaches to being baptized in water. We see in this scene that *all three persons of the Godhead endorsed it.*

Jesus went through it, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (and had not descended upon Him until He was baptized in water), and God the Father spoke from heaven saying, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* I say this with all reverence, but God bent over backwards to emphasize the extreme importance in His eyes of being baptized in water. It is important to understand that Christian baptism is not a baptism of repentance, because Jesus had no sins of which to repent. Even though He was baptized by John, He was not baptized with John's baptism. What was the purpose? Jesus states it Himself:

Matthew 3:15 (NKJV) *“Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* Jesus did not say, “It is fitting for Me to fulfill all righteousness,” but “for us.” He identifies *Himself with all who will follow Him through the waters of baptism.* When He says,

“It is fitting,” He means it is appropriate or becoming to fulfill all righteousness in this way. When you are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ as a follower of Jesus, you are not baptized with a baptism of repentance. You have repented, but that is not why you are baptized. You are baptized to “fulfill all righteousness” or to “complete all righteousness.”

This is such an important point that I want to emphasize it even more. In **Romans 5:1**, Paul writes of us, as believers in Jesus: ***“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Paul says that through our faith in Jesus we have been justified. “Justified” is one of the most important terms in the New Testament, but it is usually not well understood.

Justified has a number of different meanings:

- acquitted,
- declared not guilty,
- reckoned righteous,
- or made righteous.

Through our faith in Jesus, we have been acquitted, we are declared not guilty, we have been reckoned righteous and we have been made righteous.

That is why we should be baptized. Not because we have repented of our sins, but because it is the way to complete our righteousness. We already have righteousness imputed to us through our faith in Jesus. Water baptism is the appropriate way to fulfill, or complete, or carry out that righteousness.

Christian Baptism—A Commitment

Christian baptism is an identification with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul states this in Romans: **Romans 6:3–4** ***“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.”***

We died with Christ Jesus. We are buried in the watery grave with Him. And then out of the watery grave we arise with Him to walk in newness of life—a different kind of life than we lived before. When we are baptized, it signifies *we have come to the end of our own life.* We have come to the end of doing things in our own strength, righteousness, and power. From now on, we are going to be identified with Jesus.

Romans 1:4 informs us that Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. When we come out of the watery tomb, it is to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not raise Himself from the dead—that is very significant. He was raised from the dead by God the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 1:4 *“[Jesus was] declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”*

Two different courts, one Jewish and one Roman, had sentenced Jesus to death as a criminal. But on the third day, when the tomb opened and He was raised from the dead, God reversed those decisions. He said, “This is My Son. He is altogether righteous. And I am bringing Him back to life because He is going to be the Author of life and godliness to all who will believe in Him.” How important His resurrection is! In water baptism, we are to act out in our own experience the reality of the resurrection.

Years ago, there was a teacher of African students training them to be teachers. As part of their training they were told, “People remember thirty percent of what they hear, sixty percent of what they hear and see, and ninety percent of what they hear, see and do. So, don’t let your pupils just listen to something. Get them involved in doing something that will indicate they understand the lesson.”

God follows the same principle. He does not just teach us in theory. He lets us see truths, and He lets us then enact those truths. *Water baptism is an enactment*—a fresh enactment every time it takes place—of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the early church, new disciples could not get into the church unless they went through that enactment of the faith they professed. It wasn’t enough just to say, “I believe.” They had to act out their belief by being baptized.

Baptism—A Death Sentence

Once you have been buried and raised again in baptism, your life does not belong to you. If you want to go on living your own life, you should not be baptized, because baptism is your death sentence. But not only is it your death sentence; it then becomes your resurrection. When you are resurrected, your life no longer belongs to you. It belongs to the Lord. Baptism is your commitment to discipleship.

In Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus told His disciples what they were to do in proclaiming His gospel. He said: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Jesus said, **“Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations.”** He never told us to make church members. The biggest problem in the church today is church members who are not disciples. They actually misrepresent the truth that we are trying to proclaim. If you are not willing to be a disciple, you have no right to be baptized because it is a commitment to discipleship.

The disciples did not spend a lot of time teaching converts before they were baptized. But once the commitment was made, they taught them. When you stop to think about it, that pattern makes sense. Why waste time teaching uncommitted people? Let them prove their commitment in baptism and then begin to teach them what they need to know.

Requirements for Christian Baptism

Earlier we studied the requirements for John’s baptism. We will now consider the requirements for Christian baptism.

The first Requirement

Jesus said, **first** of all, **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...”** A person who is to be baptized, then, must have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and believed. The gospel consists of just three historical facts:

Jesus died, He was buried, and He rose again. (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

If you believe that, it is reckoned to you as righteousness, and you are justified. We have no right to baptize people who have not been confronted by the simple facts of the gospel.

The Second Requirement

The **second** requirement is repentance. On the Day of Pentecost, we read the response of Peter when the convicted, but unconverted, crowd said to him, **“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”** Peter’s immediate answer was, **“Repent.”** Remember that we discovered in a previous study that repentance is always the first step in any move toward God. Acts 2:38 **“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**

This is God’s program all in one verse: repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Why should we split it up and separate repentance from baptism by weeks or months?

Peter never indicated they needed to wait. He said, in effect, “It’s a package deal: Repent, be baptized in water, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

I know from experience that if you present the gospel to people the way Peter did and they respond, you will get the same results. It does not take a long time. It is not a long, drawn-out process. It is a crisis in a way. People are moving from one dimension to another dimension, and it should be treated urgently.

The Third Requirement

Third, people have to believe to be baptized. In **Mark 16:15–16** Jesus said to His disciples: ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”*** You are not qualified to be baptized if you have not believed. ***“He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”***

Let me point out that Jesus never offers a guarantee of salvation to those who believe without being baptized. You may say, “I’ve settled this with the Lord.” That is up to you. But you have no scriptural guarantee of salvation unless you have been baptized as a believer. And by “baptized,” I mean your whole body right under the water and up again—total immersion.

The Fourth Requirement

The **fourth** condition is stated by Peter in **1 Peter 3:20–21**. It is the answer to a good conscience toward God. In this passage Peter was writing about the days of Noah: **verse 20** ***“When once the Divine longsuffering [or patience of God] waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.*** Peter said that God would not send the flood until the ark had been prepared. God was waiting patiently until the ark was ready. Only then would He release the flood. The account tells us that out of all the people on earth only eight were saved, which is a very solemn thought. Scholars have calculated that the population of the earth at the time of Noah was probably at least two million. Out of possibly two million people, only eight were saved.

Peter then continues: **verse 21** ***“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God). . . .*** The New King James translation which we use here in this study says baptism is an “antitype.” A “type” is a symbol or figure which represents an unseen spiritual fact. The “antitype” is the fulfillment of the type or the spiritual truth which it represented.

Very simply, it means that baptism is the fulfillment of a symbol or figure from the Old Testament which, in this case, is the ark of Noah. Just as the ark saved Noah and his family from death, Peter is telling us that baptism saves us. It is not just having a bath to get clean.

We see, then, the fourth condition: you can answer God with a good conscience. In other words, you can say, “God, I know I was a sinner. I’m sorry. I repent. I believe Jesus died for me. I believe that through faith in Him I am justified, reckoned righteous. I’ve done all I can, Lord, in my condition as a sinner. Please accept me.” Having repented and believed, you answer to God with a good conscience in the act of baptism. You cannot do more than God asks. If you have done all that God asks, you have answered to God with a good conscience.

To recapitulate the four conditions for being baptized as a believer:

1. You must have heard the gospel.
2. You must have repented.
3. You must believe the gospel.
4. You must have a good conscience toward God.

I do not wish in any way to be controversial, but I think one fact is clear: an infant is incapable of fulfilling any of those four conditions. No one can deny it. It is a simple fact. I do not make this statement from any particular doctrinal persuasion, but I believe it is the clear testimony of Scripture.

Teaching for Baptism

Teaching for baptism need not take a long time. A preacher once said that a mission that he was once connected with would take six weeks to teach the converts and then baptize them. What they were doing many times was baptizing instructed pagans. The people had never really met the Lord, and their lives had never been changed.

Let’s look at certain incidents in the book of Acts which speak about the length of time from conversion to baptism.

The Day of Pentecost

On the Day of Pentecost three thousand people were baptized the same day they heard the gospel message. The apostles did not say, “Now, we’ll just wait. And if you bring forth fruit in six weeks, then we’ll baptize you.” Nor did they say, “When you’ve completed our new believer’s class you’ve met our requirements for baptism.”

They baptized them because they had met the right conditions: they had repented, believed, and they were willing to make a commitment. Notice, it was an unpopular commitment, because they were very much in the minority.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

In **Acts 8** we read that Philip had just left a very exciting revival in Samaria and, because the angel sent him, he was on the road to Gaza. He had no idea why he was there, but he saw an Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot who was reading aloud from the prophet Isaiah. So, Philip went near to him and asked, **“Do you understand what you are reading?”** (See Acts 8:30.) He was reading this passage in **Isaiah 53:7: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.”** The eunuch asked a very reasonable question in **verse 34: “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?”** Acts 8:35 tells us: **“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.”**

Philip was an evangelist, and he is a pattern for all evangelists. His message was very simple, a one-word message: **Jesus**. In Samaria he preached “Christ” and on the road to Gaza he preached “Jesus.” We should love the ministry of a true evangelist. Every time we see a real evangelist in operation it is exciting. The evangelist’s business is to introduce the sinner to the Savior; and having done that, his task is complete.

Philip introduced people to Christ in Samaria and moved on. A lot of people would have hung around because it was a very successful meeting. But Philip had instructions from God to move on and he did. *That was a test of obedience.*

To continue Philip’s story verses **36, 38: “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ . . . So, he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he [Philip] baptized him [the eunuch].”**

The account only tells us that Philip preached “Jesus.” But in the preaching of Jesus, he must have said something about baptism because the eunuch took the initiative about baptism, not Philip. The eunuch said, **“Here’s water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized right now?”** Philip replied, “All right, I’ll do it.” Then they both went down into the water. Please note that every time Christian baptism is described in the New Testament, the people go down into the water and come up out of the water.

Then Philip had an exciting experience. He was transported away by the Holy Spirit and the eunuch saw him no more. But the eunuch was not worried; he just went on his way rejoicing. The point is, possibly only one or two hours had elapsed from the time the eunuch first heard the gospel until he was baptized. *It was not a lengthy period of preparation.* He met the requirements and was baptized.

The Household of Cornelius

In **Acts 10** we read the story of the gospel being introduced to the Gentiles, which was a major transition for the Jewish disciples. Because of a vision from God, a Roman centurion had asked Peter to come to his house. Peter went very reluctantly to a Gentile home because it was against his religious convictions. He started to talk to them about Jesus and a wonderful thing happened. His sermon was interrupted. May God give us more interrupted sermons!

Acts 10:44–48 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. 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.”*

Notice, this Holy Spirit baptism is an immersion. They were immersed from above—a Niagara Falls immersion. Why were the disciples astonished? Because *“they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God,”* which was a clear indication that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit as a sign of God’s acceptance. No one could have been less ready to believe that Gentiles could become believers than Peter and his friends. But the moment they heard them speak with tongues they said, *“This is it. They have received the same as we.”*

Then Peter commanded them to be baptized in water. He did not just make a recommendation. He commanded it. *It was an act of obedience to God.* It was perhaps an hour from the time they first spoke in tongues until they were baptized in water. There was no delay.

The Philippian Jailer

In **Acts 16:22–40** we read that Paul and Silas had been thrown into prison in Philippi. They were in the innermost, maximum-security jail at midnight, the darkest hour. And what were they doing? They were singing and praising the Lord! It says the other prisoners were listening to them—they never had people like Paul and Silas in that jail before. At that particular point, their praises released the supernatural power of God and the whole jail was shaken to its foundations. Every door was opened and everybody’s chains fell off. The jailer was about to commit suicide because, under the Roman system, if any prisoner escaped, he would have had to answer with his life for the prisoner. But Paul said, *“Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”* **Verses 29–33** tell us: *Then he [the jailer] called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So, they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who were in his house.*

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

Please note, “*You and your household.*” As the head of his family, the jailer had the right to believe for his family. They were all of an age to hear the word of the Lord. They did not even wait for dawn—they were baptized immediately. Water baptism for the Christians of the New Testament was an urgent matter. They did not wait for a baptismal service, because their complete salvation depended on it. (Mark 16:16). ***“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”***

Spiritual Significance

The spiritual significance of baptism is stated in Romans 6. Romans 6:3–4 ***“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.”***

Every time Paul says, ***“Do you not know,”*** I have observed that the majority of contemporary Christians do not know. It is remarkable. In baptism we are identified with Jesus in death, in burial and, thank God, if we are buried with Him, we are also resurrected with Him.

Paul confirms this truth in the next verses: verses 5–6 ***“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 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.”***

Paul is speaking about being buried in baptism. He says if we have been buried, then we can be assured we will be resurrected, as well. Baptism illustrates the fact that when Jesus died on the cross our sinful, carnal, rebellious nature was executed in Him. This is a revelation every Christian desperately needs. You can have your sins forgiven and still be a rebel. A lot of people do just that. They go to church, confess their sins, receive forgiveness, and then they walk out and start sinning all over again. That is not God’s purpose.

One reason why this happens is that they do not know the historical fact that when Jesus died on the cross, our old man—that rebel in every one of us—was executed. There is no other solution to the rebel; the only solution is execution. But the good news is the execution took place more than two thousand years ago when Jesus died on the cross.

The Process of Reckoning

In **verse 11** Paul applies this fact: ***Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Paul says, “You know it. Then you have to reckon it.” You have to reckon that you are dead to sin but alive to God. “Reckon” means to count it as a completed fact. The outward process of that reckoning is water baptism. You go down into the grave and come up out of the grave. You leave your old sinful nature behind in the grave and you come out a new creature. There is one other important passage concerning this in **Colossians 2**. Paul is writing to Christians, and he says: **Colossians 2:11** ***“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.”***

Under the Jewish law, circumcision was simply removing a small portion of flesh. But Christian circumcision is putting off the whole sinful, fleshly nature—the whole body. When a body has died, what is the next thing we need to do? Bury it! It is offensive to leave a dead body lying around unburied. You have died, don’t lie around unburied. Get buried in water baptism so you can enjoy your resurrection!

Paul goes on in **Colossians 2:12**, that after having put off the body of the flesh we must be: ***“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.”***

Baptism only works for those who believe. It is through our faith in what God will do that we are raised. If we do not believe, it does not work. This is why Paul says in Romans that we must “reckon.” Faith, as we have studied, is believing something is true even if you cannot see or feel it. It is our faith in “the working of God” that will make it real in our experience.

Facts about Christian Baptism

We will now consider certain important facts about Christian baptism. First, in **Galatians 3:27**: ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*** We are baptized into Christ. We are not baptized into a denomination or a church. This is a serious error which is prevalent in many portions of Christianity today.

A large evangelical mission in Africa would not accept anybody as a member who had not been baptized into their mission. A person might have been validly baptized as a believer, but if it was not in that mission they had to be baptized again. That is an error; it is a fleshly human religion pretending to be spiritual. We are not baptized into a church. Thank God, we are baptized into Christ; and it is effective only through faith. In our faith we need to understand

that our new life is empowered by the Holy Spirit—faith in the “working of God.” The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead also works in us.

Examples from the Old Testament

The **first picture** from the Old Testament is one we have already looked at in **1 Peter 3**: it is Noah’s ark. Peter says the antitype to Noah’s ark is baptism in water. The message of Noah’s ark is, first, that judgment was coming. There was only one way of escape from judgment and that was in the ark. The flood represents God’s judgment. *The ark is a picture of Jesus Christ*. In the ark you can pass safely through the waters of judgment. If you are outside of the ark you will be drowned. There is no other way of escape but to be in the ark, Jesus Christ. In the ark you pass through the water in safety, and you come out into a totally different new life. The old life has been washed away; a new life has opened up to you. That is the picture of Noah’s ark.

The **second picture** is found in **1 Corinthians 10:1–2, 6**; *“¹⁻² Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. . . . ⁶ These things became our examples [or patterns].”*

Paul is telling us that every Israelite in the exodus (the deliverance from Egypt), passed through two experiences. The cloud came down over them from above, and thus they were *baptized in the cloud*. They also went down into the water of the Red Sea, passing through the water, and came up out of the water. Therefore, Paul says they were *baptized in the sea*.

Here we see this double baptism that is appointed for every believer. The cloud comes down on you from above and you are immersed in the cloud. Then you go down into the water, pass through the water, and come up out of the water. When the Israelites came up out of the water, they started a new life with new laws and a new leader. Everything else was left behind.

Notice that it was the water that cut off the Egyptians. We need to understand that although the Israelites had been saved in Egypt by faith in the blood of the lamb, that experience in itself did not separate them from the Egyptians. It was the water that separated them. In like manner, it is baptism that separates us from the power and authority of our old lives. We can believe in the blood of Jesus and be saved. But we are not separated until we are baptized.

Release from the Old Life

A preacher encountered literally thousands of people who were delivered from evil spirits. Wherever possible, he would always tell them, “If you want to keep your deliverance, be baptized in water.” Baptism in water is the cutoff from the power of the old life. The blood

saves you *in* Egypt, but the water separates you *from* Egypt. The Israelites were separated by the water and by the cloud. It says they were baptized “into Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:2). In other words, this brought them under the leadership of Moses. We, on the other hand, are not baptized into Moses, but we are baptized into Christ. Christ becomes our leader. But in order to enter into Him in the scriptural way, we have to pass under the cloud, and we have to pass through the water. This is such a vivid picture of the power of baptism.

The Element of Faith

In Hebrews we are told that this baptism was only by faith. Hebrews 11:29 ***“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.”***

If you are baptized as an unbeliever, you will go down into the water a dry sinner and come up a wet sinner! That is the only change that takes place. How did all Israel pass through the Red Sea?

By faith. The Egyptians were drowned because they had no faith. So, if you are baptized in water but you are not a believer, all that happens is you will get wet. You can only pass through to the newness of life by faith in Jesus.

The Urgency of Baptism

The urgency of baptism is a very serious subject, much more serious than most denominations and churches recognize today. Many times, people will become convicted and will ask, “What comes next?” We should say, “Be baptized.” “When?” “As soon as possible. Now!”

We need to have a reorientation in the church about our thinking regarding baptism. It is part of complete salvation. I am not saying that if anyone, as a believer, is not baptized that they will not be saved. That is between them and the Lord. But I have no authority to tell them that they will be saved either. Jesus said, ***“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”*** (Mark 16:16).

It is my heartfelt desire that as we study this subject of baptism that you will stop and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you individually about the importance of receiving water baptism. If you were baptized as an unbeliever as part of a church ritual, or if you feel convicted by the Holy Spirit that you need to receive baptism again in order to fully apprehend by faith its true importance, then I would urge you to seek out someone who can baptize you with a full understanding of its spiritual significance.