

Jesus Christ Apostolic Ministries

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Baptism:

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Mk.16:15-16

"...baptism doth also now save us..." 1Pet.3:21

From these scriptures, and others like them, we see that salvation will be given only to those who have been baptized! Let this unshakable biblical truth echo in the corridors of your spirit and mind. Without baptism, there is no hope of salvation. With that revelation, one is confronted with an obvious question: Is the baptism which we must receive a baptism with water or is it the baptism of the Holy Spirit? The earliest congregation, being exclusively Jewish, practiced two baptisms. They baptized with John the Baptist's baptism of water, telling those who humbled themselves to this divinely ordained baptism to expect to receive Jesus' baptism of the Spirit. They followed the pattern set by John, who told those whom he baptized, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Lk.3:16). These two baptisms, John's and Jesus', are the only two baptisms which God has ever ordained.

John's Baptism

John's baptism was not simply a baptism in water. Without John's message of a mightier **one coming with a mightier baptism, water baptism is nothing more than a useless soaking.** John's baptism always included an exhortation to receive the Holy Ghost baptism; his message and his baptism were two parts of one act. Twelve men in Ephesus thought they had received John's baptism, but because they had not heard about the Holy Ghost, the apostle Paul disagreed. He explained to those misinformed

Disciples that "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, SAYING..." (Acts 19:4). So we, with Paul, must conclude that even though they had been baptized with water, they had not really received John's baptism, for they had not been told

To expect the Holy Ghost baptism. John's message about the Holy Ghost was as much a part of his baptism as was the water. Those twelve Ephesians had been taught by Apollos, a very learned and God-fearing man, who himself knew nothing of the Holy Ghost baptism. When two of Paul's friends explained to Apollos "the way of God more perfectly", he exhibited a noble and godly attitude by humbling himself to the "more perfect way" of life in the Spirit (Acts 18:24-28). His first concern was not for his reputation as a great teacher of the Scriptures; rather, his first concern was to do the will of God. What a great example this Apollos was for us all! Another overlooked truth concerning John's baptism was that it had to be earned. John was not a spiritual harlot, taking in anyone who wanted to join his cause. Receiving his baptism was an honor; it was not something that a person could receive

Simply by deciding that he wanted it. One had to repent of the evil he had done; he had to confess and turn from his evil ways. Only then would John baptize him. When some unrepentant souls dared to come to John to be baptized, the man of God was harsh: O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance... (Lk.3:7-8; Mt.3:7-8). However, when sincere souls asked what to do so that he would baptize them, "He answered and said unto them, 'He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none. And he that hath meat let him do likewise.' Then came also the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, 'Master, what shall we do?' And he said unto

Them, 'Exact no more than that which is appointed you.' And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, 'And what shall we do?' And he said unto them, 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages'" (Lk.3:7-14). So, there was a price to be paid if one hoped to be baptized by John, not a price of money but a price of humility and faith. Long ago, Isaiah had spoken of this invisible currency of the heart when he proclaimed, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. And he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat. Buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa.55:1). The blessings of the Lord are indeed free; but no one receives them who does not pay His price.

The third truth concerning John's baptism which must be seen, if one would rightly understand baptism, is that no one but Jews were allowed to receive it. John, like Jesus, was sent only to the house of Israel. Concerning his commission from God, John said, when Jesus came to him at the Jordan River, "This is he of whom I said, 'After me cometh a man which is preferred before me', for he was before me. And I knew him not. But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come

baptizing with water" (Jn.1:30-31).

These then are the three indispensable elements of John's baptism:

It was for the circumcised [Jews] only.

It was given only to Jews who truly repented.

It was given with a message of Jesus' baptism of the Spirit which should follow.

If any one of these three elements is changed or missing, John's baptism is not being administered.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter appealed to a multitude of devout Jews to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Like John, Peter pleaded with his fellow Jews to repent and be baptized in water, and then to receive the baptism of the holy Ghost. This was the doctrine which God gave to the earliest congregation. Two baptisms were preached and practiced, and to do so was right at that time.

The One Baptism of Christ Paul's gospel cut against the grain of two baptisms. God did not send him to baptize in water (1Cor.1:17), and as far as salvation was concerned, Paul said there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph.4:5). The only baptism which Paul practiced or preached was the baptism of the holy Ghost. He baptized in water a few Corinthian believers, and he regretted that he had done so (1Cor.1:14-16), for it gave rise to quarrels and made room for proud boasting concerning who was baptized by which man, whether by Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, etc. To understand God's reason for sending Paul to preach only the baptism of Christ, while Peter continued to preach both John's and Jesus' baptisms, one must first notice that these two mighty men of faith were sent to different groups of people. Paul explained to the saints in Galatia that "the gospel of the UN circumcision [Gentiles] was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision [Jews] was unto Peter" (Gal.2:7). Water baptism was a part of the gospel to the Jews but not

To the Gentiles. At Cornelius' house in Acts 10, God demonstrated to Peter and to his amazed Jewish companions that He would no longer require the Gentiles to become Jews and be baptized in water in order to qualify for the baptism of the Spirit. "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the holy Ghost."

What an unthinkable event! Gentiles, whom Jesus himself called "dogs", received the Spirit of the God of Israel! Neither Peter nor the saints had a doctrine which would accommodate such an experience. It was contrary to all that they understood and taught. These Gentiles had experienced something from God that the saints never expected to happen, yet could not deny.

Had it been possible somehow to deny Cornelius' baptism into the family of God, the saints would have done so, but Peter and

his companions were reliable witnesses whose testimony could not have been questioned. The fact that Peter baptized these Gentiles in water after they were converted does not alter the fact that they received the Spirit without first becoming Jews [by circumcision] and being baptized in

water. Clearly, the family of God needed another doctrine to explain what God had done.

Paul was the man who was ordained to preach among the Gentiles the new doctrine which would explain God's new work. This new doctrine would not make void Peter's gospel to the Jews; however, it would show that Peter's gospel was limited to the Jews.

Paul taught that God did not require the Gentiles to observe the ceremonies of the Law of Moses, and that it was evil for the congregation to require it of them. The Jews were obligated by conscience and by faith to keep the whole Law (Gal.5:3), but according to the revelation given to Paul, the Law had no claim on the Gentiles' lives (Rom.3:19).

Paul was not understood by many in the family of God of his time. His most bitter sufferings were caused by believers who could not grasp what Paul was saying. It seemed so contrary to so much of what they had always understood to be the way of God. After all, every holy man from Moses' time, including Jesus, was obedient to the Law. Jesus himself refused to preach to Gentiles (Mt.15:21-28) and forbade his disciples to go to them when he sent them out to preach (Mt.10:5-6). And now Paul, the former persecutor of the saints, claimed to have received a commission from Jesus to go to the Gentiles with a new

Gospel, one which agreed with Peter's in demanding holy living, but one that excluded the need for symbolic, ceremonial works of the Law, including water baptismal rites. It was as radical a doctrine for his time as one can imagine, but it was of God. And it would prevail.

That God would have a special gospel for the Gentiles, different from Peter's gospel, was such a bizarre notion to the earliest congregation that many of them could not believe it. Though James, Peter, and other "pillars of the body of Christ" understood Paul's message for the Gentiles and endorsed it, we have no indication that most of the saints did the same. Decades after the Spirit first came upon those Jews in the upper room, every Jew who believed in Christ was still zealous of the Law (Acts 21:20), and rightly so; for had they refused to obey the Law, God would have rejected them. So, in zeal for the Law of God, but lacking knowledge, some among the believing Jews sent missionaries out from Jerusalem to teach Gentile

believers that unless they were circumcised the way Moses taught, they would be damned in the final judgment (Acts 15). Paul furiously opposed them, and later we see the apostles and elders come together to consider this matter carefully (Acts 15:6).

The controversy sparked by Paul's gospel to the Gentiles was the greatest doctrinal issue in the early congregation. But

Paul stood firm against stiff opposition, refusing "no, not for an hour" to compromise the gospel of liberty from the works of the Law. Paul taught the unheard-of doctrine that circumcision of the heart by the Spirit was the only circumcision that

counted with God. "The real Jew is not the man who is one outwardly, and real circumcision is not something physical and external. The real Jew is the man who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual, not a literal, thing" (Rom.2:28-29). We could say the same about any of the other ceremonial works of the Law. Of John's baptism, we could say that "real baptism is not something physical and external. Real baptism is a matter of the heart, a spiritual, not a physical, thing."

Paul's gospel glorified Christ beyond what the saints in his time understood, for he declared that only what Jesus Christ does for a man will save him. Only if Christ baptizes a man does God consider him baptized, and only if Christ circumcises a man does God consider him circumcised (a Jew). Paul's position was, if Jesus died for us to have it, then it is necessary that we receive it. Therefore, we conclude that if Jesus died for an unnecessary baptism, then Jesus died unnecessarily. Just One Gospel Remains

In Paul's revolutionary message of simple repentance and faith toward God are "some things", as Peter said, "which are hard to be understood". And men now, as then, distort Paul's message, "as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2Pet.3:16). But the vision of truth which was given to Paul is destined to override the strongest objections.

Today, we witness the distortion of Paul's gospel which Peter mentioned, when it is taught that being set free from the works of the Law means that we are not required to work. My friend, we must do good deeds if we hope to be saved from the coming wrath (Jn.5:28-29; Rom.2:5-11; Heb.5:9). Christ liberated us from the need to perform ceremonies, not from the necessity to obey the will of God.

Paul's gospel of liberty from the works of the Law is perhaps more misunderstood now than when it was first preached. How many are still baptizing in water, and performing other dead ceremonial works, without knowing that by doing so they are denying the sufficiency of Christ! Israel's symbolic ways of worship, including John's baptism, were needful, holy instruments of God in their time. They served their divinely ordained purpose by pointing to the Messiah. But Christ has come now, and by his sacrificial death made a "new and living way" for us to approach the Father: the way of life in the holy Spirit. If the baptism you preach is one which those without the Spirit can practice, it has no part in the kingdom of God. To worship God now in a way which was possible before the Spirit was given is to worship God in vain. Only what Jesus suffered and died to make possible is any longer acceptable with the Almighty.

There are no longer two bodies of people who belong to God: Israel and the body of Christ. No longer two Lords: Israel's High Priest and Jesus. No longer two faiths: Israel's worship in symbols, and worship in spirit and truth. No longer two hopes: the restoration of Israel as a world power, and the return of Jesus. No longer two baptisms: John's and Jesus'. But "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..." (Eph.4:4-6). In other words, there are no longer two gospels. The time for Peter's message to the Jews has passed.

Now, my friend, can you answer the question with which we began? Do you now know which baptism we must have if we hope to be saved? Do you know to which baptism Paul was referring when he wrote that we are "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him..." (Col.2:12)? The answer you give to this question, I can assure you, will be one of eternal consequence.