

Understanding biblical baptism is not optional for believers in Christ. Jesus and his apostles make it abundantly clear that this is a vital subject without which anyone not fully embracing its strictures, should not think that they are doing the right thing but are far removed from the teachings of scripture.

The Greek words translated as baptise and baptism indicate a dyers term. They mean dip soak or immerse, a going into the liquid to be fully covered so that all the material is affected by the process, not just a part of it. Keeping this in mind is helpful when analysing what is said in the New Testament and comparing this to what is taught from outside its pages.

The passage selected to introduce this topic sets out the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ viewed the subject whilst he walked among mankind. His views have not changed he still preaches the same truths!

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.....Verily, verily, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God”. When Jesus was teaching Nicodemus, a Jewish elder, he did not hold back, he did not try to quietly convince him, instead he told him what he needed to know, insisting that water and spirit must both be present together for baptism to be effective. To have only water was not enough. To have only spirit was not enough, there must be both water and spirit. Only then is someone born again.

Later in the same chapter, John the Baptist was said to be baptising at a place called Aenon. This place, whose name means “fountains” was a site of many springs, not the Jordan river itself but tributaries feeding into it. John was there baptising because there was *“much water there”*. If only a small quantity of water is necessary to make the sign of a cross on the forehead, then this requirement for much water is superfluous. If only sprinkling a little water over the candidate was necessary, why seek out much water? Much water allowed those who came to John to be soaked to be dipped to be immersed in the water. In the same way when the Ethiopian eunuch requested baptism, they both went down into the water in order for this to happen, Acts 8v38.

These baptisms took place outside in public. This commitment to a new way of life, this confession of sin and repentance was not to be done secretly but opened acknowledged before others. The Ethiopian eunuch had witnesses to his immersion, his servants saw this great figure of state humble himself before them and submit to this ritual the same as everyone else had to do. The disciples had witnesses to their act of obedience. These matters were not done in a corner.

Jesus was also baptising, but it seems that he did not baptise his twelve disciples himself, as they went to John for this. He did this alone as the unbaptised should not baptise others. He did not wait until they were themselves ready to help him, he went straight into the work just like many others who joined this endeavour. Whilst he was baptising others, his disciples came to John and were baptised of his cousin, even as Jesus had already done so himself, *“....they came and were baptised”* verse 23.

They had not sought out John the Baptist before, even when they had heard about him, and this new requirement he demanded Israel submit to. They were waiting for something. Baptism should not be rushed into as soon as it is discovered. They took time to first find the Lord Jesus and pledge themselves to him, then they were properly ready to go through the water.

He could have baptised them himself, but he did not. There must be a reason for this. Nothing is without some significance in the Bible, so much is conveyed so succinctly, another of its many divine traits. As they were very familiar to him, perhaps he thought best to let someone else take that responsibility, else he could be accused of a type of nepotism or favouritism, all things were done to ensure that there could be no criticism over something so important. He wanted them to receive the same experience of baptism as others and not to be baptised personally by him. Even in the little details there is purpose. Later once his disciples were themselves baptised, he passed on this task to them John 4v2. However, the previous verse taught that it was Jesus who made and baptised more disciples than John. It can be seen then that Jesus baptised others through the agency of his disciples. He is said to have done it, but he did not do so directly but through others. In a similar way Peter commanded Cornelius and his household to be baptised Acts 10v48 but he did not do this directly himself, he was accompanied by certain brethren from Joppa, who assisted him in the work. The apostles have assistants in this century as well as in the first. If it is done by faithful brethren in keeping with the commandment to baptise, it can be said also to be done by Christ.

Much water allowed full immersion; the ritual of baptism is one of only a handful of New Testament rituals required by God. It is not for believers to dispute this requirement but to accept it in all humility, as Jesus himself did in order *“to fulfil all righteousness”*, Matthew 3v15. As previously stated, the word for baptism comes from the word to dip and as has been pointed out by others, it's a dyers term, something being put into the liquid comes out differently, then when before it was dipped. The soaking changes it. In Romans 6v5 believers were reminded of the association between baptism and Christ's death *“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection”*. This is a conditional statement, The word *“if”* is used. If you haven't submitted to this requirement, you will not be in the resurrection to eternal life, even if you come out of the grave to face judgement. It is not optional. The total immersion in water symbolises that death of the old man. Sprinkling or spraying water does not convey the same submission to the divinely appointed type. Either you fully die, or you do not die at all. Perhaps it is because of the emphatic nature of the divine statement that baptism is vital, that some have sought to try to redefine baptism into something lesser and more easily adopted by the world to try to bring more people into its requirement. That however is not the way to respond to God's commandments, we should be doers, not judges of His Laws.

That baptism is specifically associated with death should not be a surprise as the old manner of life, indeed the old man is ceremonially put to death in the water. The disciple is to regard their baptism as when they must become dead to sin. This is not possible physically at that point but legally they become dead to sin and morally they should become dead to sin.

When Jesus went to John, the greater submitted to the lesser. This is very informative. God had directed this last of the prophets to pass on the baton to the new rising star, who was his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth. The law and the prophets were until John, and he handled the beginning of this transition away from the law towards a new grace. A process completed by Jesus. As an Aaronic priest he did not take up that responsibility of the Temple service, but instead obeyed his God by working far removed from that service> His role was to wash those from his nation who came to him, so that they could be freed from their sin. The baptism of John was certainly from heaven, Luke 20v4. At first John refused to allow Jesus to be baptised. Baptism is not a one sided activity. You do not baptise yourself. Someone else baptises you. The person doing so is significant it is not some random person who happens to walk by, but someone who is integrally involved in the process. In other passages of scripture, the authority of the baptiser is also recognised beyond the one seeking baptism. Acts 10v47 states *“Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptised?”* The very asking of this question implies that in some circumstances it was necessary and appropriate to *“forbid water”* Without water the candidate cannot be born again, as there must be both water and spirit for baptism to be complete, as Jesus taught. The only legitimate reason therefore to forbid water is when the elders do not see that the spirit is present.

The spirit here is not the Holy Spirit, nor the gifts of the Spirit as the following passages make clear. The apostles were baptised with the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts 1v5 & 2v3. If they were baptised with the Holy Spirit afterwards then their baptism with water and the spirit earlier, involved a different spirit. In Acts 8v 16 it is clear that those baptised had not partaken of the Holy Spirit at the time they went through the water. This shows that the spirit that was necessary to be present was the spirit of life in Christ, as referred to in Romans 8v1-6 This meant that it was necessary to be spiritually minded in contrast to being carnally minded in order for baptism to be acceptable. *“If any man hath not the spirit of Christ he is none of his”*, verse 10. Adopting the same spirit that Jesus exhibited is mandatory for believers. They must become like Christ and seek to change themselves from what they once were, into something different, something better. They are to be framed in the image of Christ, just as he was framed in the image of God in a perfect way, which others are not.

1 Corinthians 12v12,13 *“For as the body is one and hath many members and all the members of that one body being many are one body: so, also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptised into one Body whether we be Jews or Gentiles whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”*. Is this an example of the Holy Spirit being required in baptism? Firstly, it should be noted that the term Holy Spirit is not used here. Rather there is a universal appeal to the way baptism is, not was, conducted. Drinking into one spirit is not a term used anywhere else. Did all believers receive the gifts of the Holy spirit? Some believe that this was so, however verse 28 lists that it was *“some”* having been set in the Ecclesia with various named gifts. This is in contrast with verse 18 where God says that He has set *“every member”* in the body as a hand, eye, foot or ear, which does not require having any Holy Spirit gift to be bestowed. You can be a helpful part of the One Body without having any spirit gifts. In context the appeal that the Apostle is making included the manifestation of a dividing of the same spirit in different ways.

Romans 12v6-8 helps in the analysis of how this should be viewed. *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry let us wait on our ministering, or he that teaches on teaching; or he that exhorts on exhortation; he that gives let him do it with simplicity; he that rules with diligence; he that shows mercy with cheerfulness.”* Listed here are a mixture of Holy Spirit gifts and other gifts of the spirit which are not miraculous in the same way. If someone did not receive any Holy Spirit gifts, they were not a lesser disciple, and the same basic requirements were expected of them as it was of those who received any miraculous gifts. Those given greater gifts had greater responsibilities regarding those gifts, not greater responsibilities about wider matters.

If the passage in Corinthians is restricted to those who had the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic age, then it has no direct meaning for believers today and there would be a questioning about a different baptism which was by One (Holy) Spirit not now available in the absence of the Holy Spirit. This is not taught elsewhere, and a single unsupported passage should not be used to acceptably lay out any apparent teaching. Looking at the other passages already quoted there seems to be a widening of the use of spirit in verse 13 beyond the Holy Spirit gifts in keeping with what Jesus himself taught and his apostles expounded elsewhere. There is a sense in which the Holy Spirit still remains today after the gifts have been such a long time withdrawn. The Holy Spirit can be said to remain in the crystalised Word of God which only came about through the use of the Holy Spirit. Drinking of that spirit would not then be accessing the gifts of the spirit but absorbing the teachings of the spirit word, which was the very purpose that the Holy Spirit was given and included confirming that Word with signs following.

It is the word that begets all disciples in every age. 1 Peter 1v22,23. *“Seeing then that you have purified your souls in obeying the Truth through the spirit unto the unfeigned love of the brethren, see that love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which lives and abides for ever.”* This is true both before the arrival of the Messiah, during his ministry and of that of his apostles as well as afterwards in the long night of gentile darkness.

A vetting programme would therefore need to be undertaken in order that any candidates for baptism could be assessed with regard to the Word. It was necessary to examine them to ensure that they were fully cognisant as to what they were committing themselves unto. Who would then be forbidden by these gatekeepers from entering into the Ecclesia? That the process of keeping out undesirables was not infallible, not something overseen by the Holy Spirit, as some argue, is seen by the inevitability of the corrupt entering in unawares, Jude 1v4. God permitted it but He did not welcome it. The presence of such offenders was a by-product of entrusting limited individuals to such a vital task; however, God did not want a different system where this was not possible, the presence of tribulation gives a needed test to those claiming to serve Him. The very basis of possible failure in the task by those seeking to interview candidates was to be acceptable collateral damage to achieve a more important goal, that of honing stewardship and responsibility in His children. This cannot be done without vulnerability and risk. Why else would God permit the Ecclesia to be infiltrated by these dissenters?

This also argues against the notion that the presence of an infallible Holy Spirit is needed to make any baptism valid else vagrants could infiltrate into the church or Ecclesia.

People who reason thus, forget that God required this infiltration in the first century so why say He does not permit it now! Is your church better than the original Apostolic Ecclesia?

As spirit needs to be manifest the same as water, how can this be done without examination? There is to be the presence of the spirit in any candidate for baptism. This responsibility vests in both the applicant and the verifiers. In the multitude of counsellors there is safety. This responsibility should not be shouldered alone. It should be shouldered by the officers appointed by the Ecclesia to bear this grave responsibility. They will not act infallibly, Jude warns of certain who “*crept in unawares*” verse 4, but this does not mean that they just appeared without examination but that the process of vetting is limited by our humanity. No doubt such elders tried their best to spot and censure such at the initial point of application for baptism, but it is not always possible to catch every issue that might prove contentious. Look at Simon the sorcerer Acts 8v13-24 who although interviewed by Philip, still had a very false spirit within him which needed to be removed. He had to repent and alter his thinking; the god mammon still had a hold on his reasoning, and this needed to change.

The Ecclesia is also described as the One Body. The organic nature of the Ecclesia is seen in its role in the process of baptism. An angel could have baptised Jesus, would that not have been a glorious commencement and unanswerable statement of divine acceptance? Instead, John baptised Jesus and this is recorded in all four gospels, more accounts than the record of his birth. God chose to work through faithful people, His human messengers. John alone saw the heavens opened and the spirit descending like a dove upon him and heard the voice from heaven bestowing a blessing upon the Son. This was his personal vision, not open to all, shared only by the two cousins, thereby strengthening their resolve to fully embrace this new beginning. However, many present witnessed the event of the baptism even if the full aspect was not seen.

Unlike his birth which is only covered in two gospels, each of the gospels details his baptism, showing how important this record and testimony is to the establishment of his mission and the emphasis of his purpose. It is even more important than the manner of his birth. This is an argument against the false teaching of the incarnation as popularly believed as his birth is passed over without any reference in one of the gospels, Mark.

Matthew 3v13-17

Mark 1v6-11

Luke 3v21-22

John 1v29-34

Analysing these accounts John is seen as growing in understanding during the process of assessment before the baptism. At first, he “*forbad him saying I have need to be baptised of thee and comest thou to me?*” Afterwards he understood that this was necessary “*I knew him not but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptising with water*”. He had to change his mind about the baptism of Jesus and did so by the reasoning which Jesus, the candidate for baptism, put to him “*Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness, then he suffered him*”.

There was a humility in both as they subjected themselves to this ritual. John knew that Jesus was morally superior to him, having no sins to confess. He understandably felt awkward in baptising him. John was not himself baptised, as he articulated the need for this to be done by Jesus. However, Jesus did not object to being baptised by another lesser individual, together they would fulfil all righteousness. Jesus accepted the organic situation of the Truth which then prevailed and did not present his own opinion as a better alternative.

That John the Baptist was not himself baptised underlines the transitional role he played in bringing in this new mode of dedication to God. Before, under the law an individual had other means of dedicating themselves to a higher purpose. This was not circumcision, as that was the work of the parents not the individual. Also, no female child was ever circumcised! There is no direct equivalence between the two rituals. Under the law, a better alignment with baptism was an individual making a burnt offering to God.

If Jesus had no sins to confess, did he partake of the baptism of repentance? No, he did not, but he did partake of the One Baptism, else there is not one acceptable baptism but several, Ephesians 4v5. The spirit insists that there is only One baptism. The baptism of repentance then is an aspect, where applicable, of the One baptism, but Jesus was the exception. Was his baptism then a sham? Was it an act of someone merely going through the motions for the sake of appearances? No, it was necessary and was just as real as any other baptism which God has asked for.

The element of the One baptism that Jesus personally benefited from was the baptism for sin on both accounts. Having no personal transgressions to be atoned for, Jesus did share our human nature, for which atonement was and is, also necessary. He was therefore baptised because of sin contained in human nature. This act of obedience to the divine requirement was well pleasing to God. At his birth his mother offered doves for a sin offering, at his baptism he submitted to the requirement to atone for sin in himself, on the cross he died to put to death the old man and elevate the new man of the spirit, in all three of these cases, personal transgression was not involved.

We, however, need the baptism of repentance which he did not, Acts 19v4, and we look to Jesus to empower us to move beyond the old man whose influences we previously obeyed, towards a new and different master, that of righteousness. Jesus was always the servant of righteousness; he was never the servant of sin. He was however under the dominion of death, Romans 6v9, until he defeated it on the cross. It was both sin and death which were defeated there, not just sin. To lose sight of this is both dangerous and selfish. Dangerous because getting this wrong is to misunderstand the purpose of the gospel. Selfish because the usual reason for people to get this wrong is the focus merely upon their own salvation, as opposed to the glory of God and His stated purpose, which is God manifestation. This involved the sacrifice of Christ, first for himself then for the people, Hebrews 5v1-3. Jesus needed to be saved, Hebrews 5v7. He was saved from death when he died. So, the death he was saved from, was not dying, because he did die; but he was saved from the condemnation of death which God had righteously imposed upon mankind because for transgression.

Neither water nor spirit can be retrospectively attributed to baptism, there is no backwards ratification. Baptism is an event that marks the commencement of the new birth of the

changed relationship. When certain disciples who lacked understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Acts 19v1-5, were discovered, they were not given a bye because they had already gone through the water, instead they were required to go through the water again because their knowledge when they had gone through the water before, was insufficient. This means that of the two elements, it was the spirit that was lacking not the water. In other cases, it could be the water that was lacking. There is then a clear precedent that in cases of insufficient knowledge baptism has not been properly undertaken.

Water was not the problem; they did not need to be re-immersed because they had not been fully immersed, only sprinkled. If so, it would be dishonouring to God as it distracts from His type. Those that are merely sprinkled rather than immersed are not typically dead to the old man. If your hand or head did not enter the typical grave but stayed out of the water, your whole body has not typically died. The form of the ritual must be respected as it is God given. When we go under the water if you stay there, we will die.

When Jesus was with his disciples after he was raised from the dead, he gave them the Holy Spirit John 20v22. This was not the same as the day of Pentecost when they later received the gifts of the spirit, Acts 2v4. Neither of these occasions was at the time of their first baptism. Baptism of water and the spirit does not then refer to the granting of the Holy Spirit in any capacity. However, John said that his cousin Jesus would baptise the nation of Israel with the Holy Spirit, Mark 1v5-8. This has not yet taken place, as it is clear that the majority of those who had come to John did not remain loyal and instead turned away from the Truth during the mission of Christ. This remains to be completed by Jesus. A new and future generation of Israel will be baptised by him with the Holy Spirit. In Matthew's gospel fire is added by John to the expectation in addition to the Holy Spirit. A grave and momentous event for them to experience. What this does also demonstrate is that John included teaching about the Holy Spirit in his education of the people, so that any who had not heard of the Holy Spirit, like the disciples in Acts 19, had not received his full teaching. The baptism of John was the One Baptism.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not then a baptism of individuals, but a collective baptism of the Ecclesia represented by the Apostles in Jerusalem. In a similar way it is said that the nation of Israel was baptised unto Moses in 1 Corinthians 10v2. When the nation passed through the Red Sea, this included those who were reluctant, those who were unrepentant, and also those who were incapable of understanding what was going on. All of them, the entire nation passed through the cloud and the walls of the sea. As a nation, not as individuals, they were baptised. In the same way the Apostles were not rebaptised as individuals because of some personal need, but they were baptised by the Holy Spirit as representatives of the One Body of Christ, the new Ecclesia now commissioned to continue Christ's work on earth whilst he had ascended to heaven.

When John was baptising at the direction of heaven, he was administering the One Baptism. The people came to him to be baptised. *"There went out unto him all the land of Judaea and they of Jerusalem"*. He did not go to them. They came to him. Jesus also came to John, the suppliant to the administrator. The twelve disciples came to John, John 3v23. The pattern is that baptism involves an agent authorised who administers the action in accordance with divine teaching. There is no direct authorisation today. All have the authority to administer baptism who respond to the commandment given to his

disciples, to *“teach all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”* Matthew 28v19,20. This work of educating the concerned, if done in accordance with Biblical teaching, is not partitive but comprises *“ALL THINGS whatsoever I have commanded you”*. It is not for any to leave anything out. Those that do fail him and if they do so knowingly, they are not his representatives, they are not his disciples.

In Mark's gospel record belief and baptism are linked. 16v15,16. *“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved but he that believeth not shall be condemned.”* Belief proceeds baptism. You cannot be baptised without belief. Hence babies or young children who cannot understand and belief cannot be baptised. He that believes not shall be condemned. If a person does not believe he will not be baptised anyway. These are opposite and counter points which Christ taught to his disciples. Getting individual and collective belief right was crucial to the success of any endeavour.

Acts 8v12 details what it was that had to be believed before baptism. The substance of belief was the gospel. In the passage it is expressed as *“the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”*. Understanding what these items were was vital. A faulty understanding of the Kingdom of God is unacceptable. Failure to understand the things of the name of Jesus would exclude from an acceptable baptism. These matters are even more relevant today when after 20 centuries of corruption, the teachings of the Bible previously known if not understood, have largely been abandoned.

There needs to be faith in the operation of God. Colossians 2v12. Only when these matters are understood and accepted. Only when those who claim to believe, obey that form of doctrine which was delivered them and be Biblically baptised are they buried with Jesus in baptism. Just assuming that you have done so, is not enough. You have to be sure about such vital matters. There is a formula set out in the word to reassure.

James 1v18 adds to the understanding. *“Of His own will begat He us with the word of Truth that we should be a kind of first fruits”*. Disciples were begotten when they begin the journey of service to the Father, which is commemorated by the ceremony of baptism. It is both a figure or representation of something real, and also something actual which they were required to do. Disciples do not actually physically die, but in figure they do. They are not actually born again physically but spiritually they are truly born again, if the Word of Truth has been present at that time of going through the water. Those who are ignorant of the teaching of the Word cannot be begotten by God. It is His Word which He has elevated above all His name Psalm 138v2.

What then should be done? Galatians 3v27 *“For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.”* Putting on Christ is not some legal arrangement which excuses us from guilt because we are unconditionally forgiven of any sin we have and may yet commit. Putting on Christ is to take on for ourselves the imitation of Christ in our lives. *“Know you not that Jesus Christ is in you except you be reprobates”* 2 Corinthians 13v5. There is a need to make baptism the commencement of a journey to follow the Lamb of God whithersoever he will lead us.

Baptism allows any to be washed clean of past transgressions whatever they are, even those uncomfortable excesses that alienate so many. 1 Corinthians 6v9-11.

Passages which teach the vital necessity to be baptised.

John 3v5

Mark 16v16

1 Peter 3v21

Romans 6v3-5

Passages which teach that water is essential

John 3v5

John 3v23

Acts 8v38,39

Acts 10v47

Passages which teach to beware of different baptisms

Ephesians 4v5

1 Corinthians 12v13

Colossians 3v15

Hebrews 6v2

Passages which teach that vetting is required

Matthew 3v14

Acts 10v47

1 John 4v1

Acts 8v36

Passages which teach that baptismal belief of the gospel is essential

Mark 16v16

Acts 8v12

Acts 8v36,37

1 Corinthians 4v15

The commandment to go out unto all nations and baptise was given to the Apostles who faithfully obeyed their Lord, Matthew 28v19,20. The gospel was preached to every creature under heaven in the first century, Colossians 1v23. This does not mean that others can not contribute in their own time and situation, wheresoever God has placed all the members of the Body 1 Corinthians 12v18. You do not have to be a public speaker to be assistants in this work. To quote Robert Roberts from the Ecclesial Guide "The apostles have assistants in this century as well as the first. The lapse of time does not affect the principle."

Dr Thomas in formulating his views on such matters wrote "Can the ordinances.....be administered validly by aliens, and.....independently of the Church of Christ, which is the pillar and support of the truth?.....members of popular,,,churches, **both confession and re-immersion** are necessary for their admission into the Church of Christ".(His emphasis)

A Voice from the Altar

Russel Noonan