

BAPTISM

Chapter Nine

The Watered Down Doctrine of Water Baptism

There are a number of Bible texts to which we might refer as *Ecclesiology in a nutshell*. One such text is Acts 2:37-47. A second such text is Ephesians 4:1-16. Another is I Timothy chapter three. The ordinance that connects the believer in uniting with a local church and the beginning of his own practical Ecclesiology is the ordinance of water baptism.

“³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? ³⁸ Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ³⁹ For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. ⁴⁰ And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. ⁴¹ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them {the local congregation at Jerusalem} about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they {those believers who were saved and baptized uniting them to formal and covenantal membership with the local church of Jerusalem} continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all that believed were together, and had all things common; ⁴⁵ And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. ⁴⁶ And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple {probably second story meeting rooms in the Temple; see Acts chapter three}, and breaking bread from house to house {there were no formal meeting places yet}, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, ⁴⁷ Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:37-47).

The word “added” in Acts 2:41 is translated from the Greek word *prostithemi* (pros-tith'-ay-mee), which means *to be joined or united together*. **In this context, the union is covenantal.** Many of these individuals were not from Jerusalem. When they returned to their homes in other cities and nations, they would become the *seeds* for local churches to begin in many other cities. Most of these new converts would become foundational people for early the missionary

journeys of Paul and Barnabas as they started new local churches according to the book of Acts.

Perhaps the greatest failure in understanding water baptism is the failure to understand the spiritual dynamic of the way water baptism connects the “born again” believer to the doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology). Water baptism is intended to reflect a believer’s understanding of an already accomplished spiritual reality in the “born again” believer’s eternal and supernatural connection to the Person of Jesus Christ. Water baptism is a covenantal testimony to accountability regarding the way a person lives. The covenantal testimony of agreement is only for believers “born again” of the Spirit of God. That covenantal testimony of agreement is primarily between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ. Every believer will give account of his faithfulness to that covenantal testimony of agreement to the Lord Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Almost all Greek Lexicons give the two primary definitions of the Greek word *baptizo* (bap-tid'-zo) as to either *dip* or *immerse*. In the context of theological meaning, as water baptism portrays Spirit baptism in Romans 6:1-10 and as water baptism portrays the believer’s understanding of his salvation through faith in the Gospel as detail in I Corinthians 15:3-4, there are three aspects necessary in the ritual portrayal. These three aspects give us why the word *dip* is really the best translation of *baptizo* (bap-tid'-zo), in that to *dip* means to both immerse in water and to then remove from the water. This was the word used to signify the dyeing of a garment. Once the garment was dipped and removed from the dye, its color was changed.

In the believer’s portrayal of salvation and his baptism with the Spirit, the three aspects of salvation are all portrayed by *dipping* in water. These three aspects of salvation are the salvation of the soul from Hell, the salvation of the spirit from corruption through practical sanctification and continual cleansing, and the salvation of the body through resurrection/translation in glorification. The mode of water baptism therefore must portray all three of these aspects of salvation.

1. Death in that the “old man” (the believer’s sin nature) was crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6 and Colossians 2:20)
2. Burial with Christ (Romans 6:4) signifying the “putting off” (Ephesians 4:22) of the “old man” (Colossians 3:8-9)
3. Resurrection with Christ (Colossians 3:1) and the “putting on” (Ephesians 4:24) of the New Nature “in Christ” to “walk in the newness of life” (Romans 6:4) in the union and unity with Christ in the baptism with (I Corinthians 12:13), and filling of (Ephesians 4:3 and 5:18), the Holy Spirit

Because there is such a shallowness in understanding the spiritual significance of what is portrayed in water baptism, we have created generation after generation of extremely shallow Christians. To make water baptism merely a testimony of salvation is a great abuse of the ordinance. As I have said repeatedly in these studies, water baptism is connected to sanctification, not salvation. Secondly, that sanctification is always connected to formal local church membership. Sanctification within the *ecclesia* is the biblical pattern of the practice of water baptism throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

We find this transition from positional sanctification in the believer's *standing* "in Christ" in Romans 5:2 leading into practical sanctification through the supernatural enabling of the indwelling Holy Spirit in Romans chapter six. These verses are critical in teaching an individual the spiritual significance to a decision to be water baptized.

“¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ² By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; ⁴ And patience, experience; and experience, hope: ⁵ And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us {*the yielded believer becomes a potential distribution center of God's grace*}” (Romans 5:1-5).

The phrase in Romans 5:2 is critical to our understanding of Spirit baptism - “into this grace wherein we stand {*continue or abide-in the sense of a new level of supernatural existence*}.” If we understand the word “grace” to mean the *potential* for the supernatural enabling of a believer's life, we can understand how water baptism is intended to portray the believer's understanding of *positional sanctification* as the entrance into this new supernatural existence and the potential for the release of the *Christ-life* through practical sanctification and the filling of the Spirit. Because the emphasis of water baptism is wrongly put upon a mere testimony of salvation (*looking backward*), most new converts miss the significance of water baptism as its intent is to give them a new vision (*looking forward*). The new *forward vision* that is part of a proper understanding of water baptism is that of a believer's supernatural potential as he learns to die daily to self and completely yield to the indwelling Spirit of God.

“¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound {*the gift of God's supernatural enabling is not about living permissively or*

selfishly}? ² God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ³ Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: ⁶ Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:1-6).

Obviously, water baptism is intended to portray an understanding of certain absolutes necessary to being supernaturally enabled to live each moment of our lives in practical sanctification before God. To allow someone to be water baptized without their understanding of these absolute necessities in order to live a sanctified life is perhaps the greatest of abuses to the beginning of that new life “in Christ.” Therefore, explanation of water baptism should involve the in-depth explanation of three levels of commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A commitment to die daily to the “old man”

“I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” (I Corinthians 15:31).

“¹⁹ For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. ²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:19-21).

“²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law {*no limitations*}. ²⁴ And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-25).

A commitment to ongoing repentance, confession and cleansing of sin so as to live as much as is possible in perpetual “fellowship” with Christ

“⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:5-9).

“⁸ For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: ⁹ (For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) ¹⁰ Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Ephesians 5:8-11).

Total and absolute yieldedness to the indwelling Holy Spirit of God and the will of God revealed through the Word of God

“⁷ For he that is dead is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: ⁹ Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. ¹⁰ For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God {*this is the twofold model and spiritual view of the believer modeled in water baptism*}. ¹¹ **Likewise** reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. ¹³ Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. ¹⁴ For sin {*the sin nature*} shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. ¹⁵ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. ¹⁶ Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin {*the sin nature*}, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. ¹⁸ Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness ¹⁹ I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:7-19).

Obviously, a decision to be water baptized is intended to connect a saved believer to a commitment to discipleship. Therefore, a water baptism decision is actually an enrollment into God's ordained organization for discipleship, which is the local church. Water baptism is intended to be the entrance into the discipleship process and the covenantal agreement that defines New Covenant living and ministry within the context of a local church community. Clearly, Jesus taught these various levels of commitment necessary to being one of His true disciples.

“²⁵ And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, ²⁶ If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. . . ³³ So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:25-27 and 33).

Water baptism connects the believer to a covenantal relationship in formal membership with the local “body of Christ,” which in turn connects the believer to the ongoing process of discipleship within that local assembly. A commitment to discipleship is a commitment to learn the Word of God and live the Word of God through “the work of the ministry.” The “work of the ministry” is to proclaim the Gospel, baptize those that are saved into local churches, and teach those that are baptized to “observe” (live or do) the teachings of Jesus. The “work of the ministry” is never separated from the sending authority of the local church. A person must be connected covenantally to the “body” of a local assembly in order to have authority to minister in the Name of Jesus Christ as the “head” of that local assembly. Anything else is completely foreign to biblical practice.

Water baptism, as it relates to the local church, represents Spirit baptism as it relates to the “church of the first born” in the “general assembly and in “the regeneration.” Jesus, in His incarnation, became a *new* and *last* Adam in the union of His humanity and deity. In His humanity, He succeeded where the first Adam failed. There are two Bible texts that, when read in conjunction with one another, give us the depth necessary to understand this radical dispensational transition in “the regeneration” (the “new creation” or New Genesis “in Christ”). We will not comprehend the covenantal responsibilities of water baptism within a local church assembly until we understand water baptism's spiritual reality in Spirit baptism.

“¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet {*aorist*} to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered {*aorist*} us from the power of darkness, and hath translated {*aorist*} us into

the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴ In whom we have {*present*} redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness {*remission of the penalty*} of sins: ¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn {*pro-tot-ok'-os, in preeminence, not in time: see John 8:58-'Before Abraham was, I am'*} of every creature {*created being*}: ¹⁶ For by him {*the eternal, self-existent Son of God*} were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him {*again, eternal preeminence or Lordship is implied*}: ¹⁷ And he is before {*used in the sense of above, or superiority*} all things, and by him all things consist. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church {*referring here to the "general assembly" rather than the local assembly*}: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell; ²⁰ And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:12-20).

A.W. Tozer said, "In many churches Christianity has been watered down until the solution is so weak that if it were poison it would not hurt anyone, and if it were medicine it would not cure anyone!" This is certainly true regarding the doctrine of the Church. I believe *watered down* Christianity begins with a *watered down* view of water baptism.

In Colossians 1:15-17, the emphasis is on the ETERNAL BEING of Jesus. In Colossians 1:18-19, the emphasis turns to the present resurrected glory of the Incarnate One. Jesus is Lord of the Church (the "first fruits" of the New Creation). The "church" is composed only of people who have put their faith in the FINISHED WORK of Christ for their salvation (both living and dead). They have already been "born again" into this "kingdom . . . of light." The word "church" in Colossians 1:18 refers to the future resurrected and glorified body of believers that will rule and reign with Christ during His one-thousand year reign on earth. Nonetheless, the "kingdom . . . of light" is still in their present reality of existence along with this material world. However, salvation is not the only qualification for formal membership in a local church. Water baptism is intended to precede formal membership in a local assembly and portray the covenantal responsibilities of New Covenant Christianity in a commitment to become a disciple of Jesus. If we miss this significance of the ordinance of water baptism, we miss its primary purpose.

Jesus is "the beginning" (Col.1:18) of this New Creation. The emphasis of this text is not on the "church," but on the regeneration to this NEW LIFE (existence) - the New CREATION. Jesus is the beginning of the New Creation as the now eternal God\man. The intent of the discipleship process within the

organism of a local assembly is to teach the enrolled disciple to know the Word of God and how to live the Word of God through the supernatural enablement of the indwelling Spirit of God.

“Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away {aorist tense}; behold, all things are become {perfect tense} new” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus is the “firstborn out from among the dead” into this New Creation. In the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, what man sees as an *end*, God sees as a *beginning* of a New Genesis.

“⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? ⁵⁶ The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:51-57).

It would be of little value to be Lord of a dead and condemned creation. Jesus died so we could become part of His New Creation. “All things” (Colossians 1:17) refers to both the spiritual and material universe including the “church.” Spirit baptism places the “born again” believer into that New Creation. Discipleship teaches him how to live supernaturally in this world although he is no longer “of the world” (John 17:14). The words “might have pre-eminence” (Colossians 1:18) means Jesus is *made* Sovereign LORD. As the Son of God, He has always been Sovereign LORD. Colossians 1:18 is referring to Jesus as the new Federal Head of humanity in His restoration of Adam’s lost dominion to Satan. This restoration of dominion will not happen until Christ takes Kingdom Age rule of planet earth and Satan is bound for the thousand years of the Kingdom Age. However, there is a present aspect of this dominion restoration in this present worldly existence when individual believers make personal choices in submission to the will of God. That is what the word “might” means.

In Colossians 1:18, Jesus is also referred to as “the firstborn of all creation.” This does not refer to Jesus being the first created being. “Firstborn” is a Hebraism - a Hebrew phrase, idiom, or custom that can only be understood by understanding

the idiom or custom. Being the “firstborn” was a *position of priority*. Therefore, the “firstborn” was usually the oldest in the family and resultantly held the patriarchal position of priority (“preeminence,” Col. 1:18).

“²⁷ Also I will make him {*the Messiah*} *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. ²⁸ My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. ²⁹ His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven” (Psalm 89:27-29).

Therefore Christ Jesus possesses this position as the “last Adam” (I Corinthians 15:45) and as the new *Federal Head* of the New Creation based on the fact He is the “image of God,” or in essence is God. The first Adam was created in the “image of God,” but that image was defaced in his fall into the corruption of sin. Water baptism signifies an understanding of a disconnect from the cursed Adamic family and a new connection to the family of God (John 1:11-12)

Since no one of the creation is older than the Creator, He holds the first patriarchal position of priority (Colossians 1:16). He became part of His creation by being born as a baby. “Image” refers to Jesus being a physical revelation of the “invisible God.” “Firstborn” refers to, and amplifies, the fact that even though Jesus had a physical birth, He is *eternally preexistent*. According to Colossians 1:17, the material creation was not only brought into existence by Jesus, but the material world was also completely dependent upon Him for its continuing existence (“by him all things consist”).

Therefore, a believer’s baptism with the Holy Spirit is a baptism into the “new creation” of the last Adam and the “church of the first born.” This “church of the firstborn” exists embryonically in local churches during the Church Age. The whole of the “church of the firstborn” will have its first assembly at the rapture (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). At that time, all believers from all individual local churches existing during the Church Age will be united in “the general assembly.” Because Christians have a superficial understanding of what has happened to them in their baptism with the Spirit into the “body of Christ,” they also have a superficial understanding of what water baptism is intended to portray in its connecting the believer to his covenantal responsibilities within the “body of Christ” in his local church.

“¹⁸ For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, ¹⁹ And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which *voice* they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: ²⁰ (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it

shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: ²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) ²² But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling {*sanctification not propitiation*}, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel. ²⁵ See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not we escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: ²⁶ Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. ²⁷ And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:18-29).

Water baptism connects the believer’s thinking to the spiritual dynamic of his Kingdom Age responsibilities within the Church Age (Hebrews 12:28). Water baptism also disconnects the believer’s thinking from this world and connects him Eschatologically to the future destruction of the original Adamic creation (Hebrews 12:25-27).

Water baptism is a testimony that unites a “born again” believer with other “born again” believers as *accountability groups* established within various local churches. This unity in the formal membership of a local church exists within the process of discipleship (Ephesians 4:1-32). This unity grows through the ongoing process of discipleship on three fronts of spiritual growth:

1. Unity in **doctrine** that is acquired through detailed teaching of the Word of God and personal study of the Word of God
2. Unity in missional **purpose** to reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, baptize those saved in the “Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach “them to observe all things,” which defines the third front of unity
3. Unity in **practice**, which defines the ministry of a local church comprised of individuals who understand the responsibilities of holy living and the obligations of their individual positions as believer-priests before God

Ephesians 4:1-32 is *Ecclesiology 101*. It is the exposition of God’s intent in the ordination of the local church defined in its doctrine, purpose, and practice.

This threefold “unity of the Spirit” can never exist in any believer’s life until that believer first unites himself with a local church.

“¹⁴ These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: ¹⁵ But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (I Timothy 3:14-16).

God has ordained the ministry of the local church as the central vehicle of discipleship. Although the *home* and *family unit* is a prominent institution within the plan of God, the Great Commission was given to the Church. The home or family unit are not the “pillar and ground of the truth.” The local church is “pillar and ground of the truth.” The two ordinances of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are local church ordinances administrated through the authority of local churches. There is no such thing scripturally as a *parachurch* organization today. Show me a ministry that emphasizes the home at the expense of deemphasizing the local church and I will show you an unscriptural ministry. Show me a mission organization that is not directly connected and submissive to the local church and I will show you a mission organization that is abortive to the ordained methodology of God. This is a fundamental doctrine. Water baptism is God’s ordained ordinance that introduces every “born again” believer to live within this dynamic of obedience within and through local churches.