

Water Baptism

Water baptism is one of the three physical operations given by God to the Christian Church. The whole truth, through the preaching of the gospel, in the New Testament, leads Christians into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and that relationship operates through the Holy Spirit and is therefore a 'spiritual relationship'. John, the apostle, says "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ", and such fellowship can only operate by the Holy Spirit. Christians therefore must be 'born again', receiving a new nature, the divine nature of God, which brings them into the 'spirit'. Romans chapter 8 tells us, "We are not in the flesh but in the spirit if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in you".

The apostle Peter tells us, in the second chapter of his first letter, that we are to offer up 'spiritual sacrifices' acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Therefore, the whole emphasis for the church is on spiritual things, on spiritual sacrifices, moving the body of Christ away from physical things; ordinances, garments, buildings, altars, and any other concept which the human mind can conceive as a substitute for being spiritual. In the Old Testament they were not to make any image which might be considered to be like God. The Lord wanted to keep them from physical forms of things to worship; from any type of idol which they might try and worship. He does the same with His church too.

Perhaps one of the best and easiest to acknowledge for example, is the replacement in human thinking of physical/natural things for spiritual things, is the use of the word 'church'. The general concept is that the church is a building, indeed many Christian organisations/denominations spend huge amounts of time, energy and money on buildings, where the real church is the people, the Christians themselves; the 'eglesia', the 'called out ones'. The church is therefore a spiritual body, the body of Christ and nothing to do with bricks or wood, or mud walls and iron sheets for walls and roofs, but so many Christians still see the church as the building, as of course, does the world.

In spite of this entire truth, God has still given His church, this spiritual body, three physical things to do. We need to understand why He has done so and ensure that we comply with God's will. Water Baptism is, of course, one of the three and is the subject of this teaching. 'Breaking of Bread' is the second, and the third, and possibly the least recognised, is 'the wearing of head coverings'. It could be said that only the first two apply to the whole church and the third to women only, but the fact that the man **is not** to wear a 'head covering' is just as significant in the order of things as that a woman **is** to wear one. The author has written a teaching on 'Breaking of Bread', and Mr G W North has written 'A Sign of Authority' on 'head coverings', both are available on www.revivaluk.org.uk, please read them for a more complete understanding of these subjects.

So, we have these three physical things for the church of Jesus Christ to do. God never makes mistakes, so we must submit to His will and discover a true understanding of what the Lord is saying and why. In this teaching we will look at Water Baptism, but first we should say that, while Water Baptism we do once and it is a picture of the 'beginning' of our Christian lives, 'Breaking of Bread' is all about 'continuing in the faith' and it is to be done 'often'. It speaks to us of 'living by Jesus Christ', and that once we have begun with Him we must continue with Him in all things, our lives being totally dependent on Him and relying completely on His spiritual nourishment. The issue of 'head coverings' relates to God's order in His church, the position of authority within His body, and this too is vitally important and needs to be shown by physical things. We are told that 'head covering' is a sign to the angels, spiritual beings, and is therefore, among other things, for the spiritual protection and safety of women. This is to enable them to worship, pray and minister in the gifts of the Spirit

with total freedom. This is as they are submitted, within the church, in the right order to God and to man.

However, the observation of any of the physical things is only of true value if there is a corresponding spiritual work in the heart. For someone to break bread when their heart is not right with the Lord and when they are not living by Him is of no worth, indeed it is dangerous. Paul the apostle tells us that if we do not discern the Lord's body, if we do not judge our own selves, when we 'break bread', then God will do that for us, and it explains why there are many weak and sickly in the church and 'some sleep', in other words, have died. It is that serious, as far as God is concerned, and is the only Biblical reason given for sickness among the church of the Lord Jesus; our hearts therefore must be right with Him, we must discern the Lord's body when we 'break bread'. Again, if a woman has her head covered but is not submitted in her heart, the physical presence of a 'head covering' makes no difference; indeed if a man's head is not covered and again in his heart he is not submitted to the Lord, the lack of covering is of no value; both the man and woman are in sin and need to get right with God. Nothing is hidden from the Lord and He is the discernor of the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. The same principle applies to Water Baptism; if we have not had a real experience of the Lord Jesus in our hearts, the water on the outside of us will make no difference at all, all it does is make us wet. The very thought that just the physical experience without any work of God in the heart, either before or during the baptism, is of any value is a total nonsense.

It is clear in the New Testament that Water Baptism is by total immersion. In John 3.23 we read of John the Baptist baptising where there was 'much water'. He also used the river Jordan for baptisms; plenty of water. Jordan interestingly means 'judgement' and indeed that is what John's baptism speaks of, a coming to God's judgement on sin, and a repentance and going away and putting things right. Christian baptism of course is much more, it is a spiritual baptism of which Water Baptism is the outward act of a public declaration, but again the 'spiritual baptism' involves a judgement. Without such a judgement of our lives based on the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, Water Baptism, as we have said, is of no eternal value. Many churches and denominations base a religious experience around the external physical act, whereas the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ declares a life-changing experience, where sin is removed from the life and the divine nature is established in the heart. Nothing less than this is the true experience of Jesus Christ which God intended for us to receive. However, in times when the Spirit of God has stopped moving in power and people harden their hearts, the real gospel and work of God is substituted by physical acts and systems. These physical things can be easily carried out by human beings, with lots of ceremony of course, whereas the true spiritual experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit can only be worked by God alone. The physical things can be everything from buildings to vestments, from incense and holy water to liturgy and ceremony, and only leads to an experience based on a physical act. It deceives those who go through the act as if that is all there is. There can of course be emotion involved in all these things, celebrations with family and friends and so on, but the true experience God intends for His people brings them into 'new birth' and a total life transformation. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again", and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross was designed to enable men and women to be 'born again'; to know a true inward spiritual transformation and not just have an external physical experience, even with all the emotion and celebration such an experience may involve. "He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". That is the work of the cross, the death of our Lord Jesus and the baptism in the Holy Spirit baptising us into Jesus death.

To return to just the physical act of water baptism and the deception which has grown up around it. It is now believed and preached and taught by some denominations that children are 'born again'

when they are baptised as infants; it is often called a Christening and involves 'godparents' promising to work to bring up the child in the Christian faith, into which the child is meant to have just entered by their baptism, usually by the sprinkling of water. The whole thing, of course, is erroneous, but it does spiritual harm to the child and can open them up to oppression from the enemy; partaking in any erroneous act will cause spiritual damage to anyone and definitely will hold them under the power of the denomination into which they have been 'baptised'. It will make them feel an allegiance and obligation to the denomination and hinder them coming to a true experience of the Lord Jesus and a real spiritual baptism.

New birth can only take place by the coming of the Holy Spirit into the heart of a person. Peter on the day of Pentecost said *"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"*. To receive the Holy Spirit there must be a deep confession of and repentance from sin and that cannot be accomplished by a child who is a few days or weeks old. The error comes from a misunderstanding of Mark's gospel chapter 16 which says *"He who believes and is baptised shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be damned"*. This led to the panic to baptise children in water so that they would be 'saved', in case they died at a young age. The error then moved to say that such an act, an infant baptism, would bring about a regeneration of the spirit. Such an error is very widespread in certain denominations and they believe baptism as a child is enough for eternal salvation thus bringing their members into a false hope of eternal life. 'Sprinkling' came in because the richer people were not keen on being totally immersed, as it was beneath their dignity, and then the error spread to sprinkling children and we now have the practice within many denominations of 'Christening' children by sprinkling them with some holy water, believing that they are 'saved', 'born again', and all is well for them forever. It is a serious error, as we have identified above.

Following such a belief means Water Baptism, which God has meant to be a public confession of faith and an identification with the Lord Jesus in His death and the burial of 'old lives', degenerates into a religious device of human creation which neither changes lives or gives eternal life; it may make the participant a member of their denomination or church but it can never make them a member of the church of Jesus Christ. Reducing the truth of 'Water Baptism' and what it shows, of course, weakens its value to Christians and the church. To become a member of Jesus' church we have to be baptised by one Spirit into His body; that is the 'one baptism' of which Paul tells the Ephesian church; the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

So, we have seen what is not true 'Water Baptism', so let us look at the real thing and see what the Lord is trying to teach us. As mentioned earlier, it is a thing which is only done once. There was some teaching, some years ago, about 'baptism in the Name of Jesus only' and that led some to teach a second baptism in water if the first time had not been in the name of 'Jesus only'. Such a teaching runs contrary to the words of the Lord Jesus, "Go into all the world and teach, or make disciples of, all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost". However, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles they usually baptised in the Name of Jesus; it seems that both are acceptable. In the 'Acts' it is clear that they did everything in the 'Name of Jesus', as they understood the authority of the Name of Jesus. The lame man at the Beautiful Gate was healed 'in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth'; "It is His name through faith in His name which has made this man whole". So, when baptising anyone or doing anything they would have operated in the Name of Jesus, doing all things under His authority. It would have been a total imperative in the minds and hearts of the first apostles, and indeed the whole early church, that everything must be carried out in the will and under the authority of the Lord Jesus; they knew that He was the Lord and there could be no other basis for any action they would take. All this does not negate Jesus' instructions

and one would suggest that either pronouncement is acceptable, what is important is what is in the heart of the believer and they are truly identifying themselves with the Lord Jesus in His death; it is Him they are looking to at this time and not the church or organisation or person performing the baptism for them. One would strongly suggest that whatever was said over someone when they were baptised in water by total immersion as a believing adult, there is no ground for baptising someone a second time.

So, Water baptism is done once and it is a physical and public demonstration of a 'beginning'. The initial experience of the Christian is the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'. Again, even that is open to controversy with some preaching the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' as a second and some even a third experience which God gives. If we look at the New Testament it is clear that in the beginning the first experience was to be 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. This fulfils Jesus promise to send 'another comforter'; "You know Him for He is with you and in that day He will be in you"; "Don't depart from Jerusalem for you will receive the promise of the Father John baptised in water but you will be baptised in the Holy Spirit not many days hence". In Acts 2 they were all 'filled with the Holy Ghost' and Peter in his preaching declares this to be the fulfilment of the word from the prophet Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh". Therefore the experience of the 120 in the upper room on the day of Pentecost was the normal expectation of the fulfilment of the prophecy, God's wonderful promise to the church. In Acts 8, Peter and John went to Samaria to pray for those who had believed under Philip's ministry and been baptised in water, in the name of Jesus, but on whom the Holy Spirit had not fallen. So we can see that it is possible to believe and be baptised in water and not receive the Holy Spirit; but being filled with the Holy Spirit is essential, so Peter and John go to pray for the people so that their experience is complete. In Acts 19, Paul, in Ephesus, meets disciples and asks them if they have received the Holy Spirit and they reply that they have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. "Into which baptism have you been baptised then" asks Paul; "John's baptism" they reply. Paul then explains the truth that they need to receive the Holy Spirit. He baptises them in the Name of the Lord Jesus and then lays hands on them and they receive the Holy Spirit. We see there are a number of permutations of experience, but the vital thing is that people are filled with the Holy Spirit; so perhaps it is good not to be too dogmatic with our doctrine and draw lots of absolute conclusions. However, it seems essential that, as Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, people are told that they will receive the Holy Spirit. Preachers should not make assumptions and must preach the gospel properly saying that receiving the Holy Spirit is essential, it is God's total and highest will for a human being that they should be filled with the Spirit of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit into a life does not necessarily come with 'Water Baptism', though of course it can. The requirement is a repentant heart, a confessing of sin bringing about a clean vessel, and a believing expectant heart into which the Lord Jesus can pour the Holy Spirit.

We can understand therefore why some of these differences in doctrine have occurred, usually through poor preaching and a failure to give the full truth to those who hear. The lack of genuine and heart felt repentance is another factor; 'come and be saved and get blessed' is not the gospel. Some people have formed a rigid doctrine around their own experience; however valid that experience of God is, it is what the Bible says which is the only basis for truth. Some have come to the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' through much seeking and being aware of the lack of power and holiness in their own lives, even though they have believed for the forgiveness of sin. That was the experience of the author, but we should be totally aware that only when we are filled with the Spirit of God can there be the life change that Jesus intended for us when He died for us on the cross. No one needs to have to defend their experience of Jesus Christ, wherever we are with Him. He will do more and bring us into the fullness of His Spirit and go on keeping us full, enlarging our hearts, so we become more like Him in our thoughts and ways, looking for His coming again. That is the right

attitude to have and rather than criticise and dispute Christians should be encouraging one another on into increasingly greater experience of God. "Greater works will you do because I go to my Father".

So, the key experience is the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'. This is the 'one baptism' of which Paul speaks to the Ephesians. There are seven things in chapter 4; one Spirit, one body, one hope of our calling, One Lord, one faith, one baptism, and One God and Father. We see that among the seven is only one experience, the 'one baptism', and that must be a 'spiritual baptism' as Romans 6 tells us that "Those of us who were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death".

The word for baptism in the original language comes from the idea of marinating food: for example, by placing a piece of meat into a liquid, and for the liquid to permeate, with its effect, through the whole piece. So it is with this baptism into the death of Jesus Christ. There is an immersion into His death so that the effect of that death goes right through our whole being. It is to render the old man, our old sinful nature, inactive, that our old self is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away with (NIV), the KJV says that the 'old man' might be destroyed; both say that we should no longer be slaves or servants to sin. Here is the freedom for the Christian, for such is the greatness of this wonderful spiritual baptism, and such is the power of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ in which He condemned, or judged, or brought to death, sin in the flesh. Baptising us into Jesus' death means that having been joined with Him, 'planted' the KJV tells us, in His death we shall also be joined (planted) with Him in His resurrection, so that we can walk in 'newness of life'; not 'have a new life' as the NIV wrongly translates it.

Here therefore is the spiritual reality of this spiritual baptism; sin is a spiritual problem, sin entered into the spirit of Adam, the first man, when he sinned by disobeying God, and was therefore passed on, in the spirit, to all who come from Adam. Sin needed a spiritual answer. Jesus Christ offered Himself, for us, through the eternal spirit, and that spiritual offering is enough to satisfy the judgement of God on the sin of the whole world. For each person to be free they have to be brought into that death, the place where the judgement took place, and come through Jesus' death into His life. As Jesus died unto sin once, He dies no more, so we are told to 'reckon ourselves dead unto sin and alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

So, Water Baptism is the physical demonstration that such a spiritual experience has taken place in a life. The Bible talks about being buried with Him by baptism into death, that again is a spiritual burial by a spiritual baptism; but Water Baptism is the great public declaration of that burial. When a body is buried it is placed completely into the ground, none is left above the ground as there is the need to put every part of the corrupt body into the earth. So with the spiritual baptism all of our old nature is put into the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with Water Baptism the whole body is immersed into water to demonstrate that all has been buried with Jesus in His death and none of the old remains active. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have been made new". It is clear with Water Baptism that we do not leave the body under the water, but bring it immediately up out of the water; so with the spiritual baptism, the person who goes through such a baptism is immediately brought up into life, eternal life, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; "if we have been planted in the likeness of His death we shall also be planted in the likeness of His resurrection". Hallelujah.

So, if this baptism is a spiritual one what value is Water Baptism? It is quite clear that the public confession of sin and the identification with the Lord Jesus in His death was very much part of the New Testament church life. Paul the apostle, immediately after his conversion, was visited by Ananias and was baptised; we read Paul's own account in Acts 22, and Ananias's words to him, "Why

do you delay? Arise and be baptised (in water) and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord". The Ethiopian Eunuch likewise asked, "What stops me being baptised?" i.e. in water and being told, "If you believe with all your heart" he could go ahead. Then on his confession Philip baptised him in the water that was there. On the other hand, we read of Simon the sorcerer, who we are told believed and was baptised, and yet later offered to pay for the ability to lay hands on people so that they could receive the Holy Spirit, and was told he was still in the bond of iniquity. Clearly the 'Water Baptism' had not changed him and whatever he had believed had not changed him either. It all depends on the heart, as we have said, yet it is essential for there to be this public identification with the Lord Jesus in His death and a rising up to walk in newness of life. However the true experience of the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' will, and indeed must, transform a life; "by their fruits you will know them."

In some countries, especially where there is persecution, Christians are only really considered to be a Christian by their public confession. Sometimes they may be imprisoned for their faith once they have been baptised in water. There is anecdotal evidence that Water Baptism can remove access to the enemy being able to attack a Christian life; it is that determined identification with the Lord Jesus in Water Baptism which fully shows the resolve of their faith. It is clear also that some people have been filled with the Holy Spirit and/or healed in Water Baptism. Often being baptised in water can be a real act of faith and courage, perhaps being bold and trusting the Lord Jesus despite the risks and the laws of a country. Other times it can be making a stand against the wishes and demands of families or friends. Such faith the Lord will honour, so it is no wonder that all these things give genuine great possibilities for God to work in Water Baptism; we cannot limit God, we cannot put Him into a doctrinal box and define what He can and will do in a life submitted to Him. "He is able to do above all that we can ask or think by the power that works in us". The timings and bounds of God's work cannot be limited, as His love knows no limits and He will work to bless His people, especially when they put their trust in Him. The ultimate real intention and purpose of God is that we are filled with the Spirit of God and know His power, strength and ability in our lives. Hallelujah.

However, what is totally clear is that all Christians on the confession of their faith in the Lord Jesus should be baptised by total immersion in water, calling on the name of the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. It identifies them publicly with Jesus' death and then with His resurrection. Ideally it should be done as soon as convenient after conversion. There is no need for a long period of training to examine suitability; it is about faith and not about learning. Water baptism is not to be used, as some do, as an entry into a denomination or ministry. It is, as we have said, an identification with the Lord Jesus Christ and not a means of conforming to the doctrinal requirements of any church grouping. It is not a requirement to be able to 'break bread' within a church. All these things are used by men in their specifications for membership of their church and the usage has no Biblical basis.

The Biblical basis for church membership is to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ, His one true church, and the method of entry is to be 'Baptised in the Holy Spirit'. Such an event is not in the power and prerogative of men, or a denomination, or a ministry, but in the Lord Jesus alone. John the Baptist said, "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire". John, the great messenger before the face of the Lord Jesus, says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," and, "He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire". These are the two great works of our Lord Jesus as far as human beings are concerned; the first is to take away the reason for our spiritual death, and the second then to give us His Spirit that we may have His life. Just as much as no person but Jesus can take away our sins, so can no person but the Lord Jesus baptise us with the

Holy Spirit. So, Jesus baptises us into His body by His Spirit so that we belong to Him, to His church. No church or denomination or ministry owns its members, all are members of Jesus Christ, of His body, and belong to Him; He alone has paid the price for them. This great and wonderful spiritual baptism immerses us, as we have said, into Jesus' death thereby destroying our old man and rendering it inactive so that we can be raised again to walk in newness of life, in fellowship with our Lord Jesus; we may then serve Him and honour Him in this life, being a witness of His death and resurrection. If that has taken place in our hearts, as we have believed on the Lord Jesus with all our hearts, if we have been buried with Him by baptism into death, it is totally right and proper that we should be baptised in water as a public testimony of our faith in the Lord Jesus, declaring that we belong to Him and are identified with Him in His death, so that we should no longer serve sin but walk in newness of life serving righteousness.

John the Baptist's baptism was one of repentance. It was for Israel to put away sin, as a preparation before the coming of the Lord Jesus. Sin always blocks the work of God and, amazingly, when Israel went out to be baptised by John in Jordan much sin was forgiven, and this opened the way for the Lord Jesus, the apostle of their faith, to come with all His miracles, healings and deliverances for the people, in the love of God. God loves Israel and grieved over the state into which they had fallen with so much need. He sent His Son to bring much deliverance and John had to prepare the way. Even though Jesus did so many wonders, Israel still did not recognise Him and in the end crucified Him, and yet in the wisdom of God that became the means of salvation for the whole world, Jew and Gentile. Even today people preach the sort of baptism John preached; they only preach forgiveness of sins. What must be preached is the real baptism in the Holy Ghost which changes our natures and makes us new creations in Jesus Christ, reconciled to God and at peace with Him. As we said above, sin blocks the work of God and until our sin is brought into the death of the Lord Jesus it will prevent God moving in our lives. Once we are baptised into Jesus' death by the spiritual baptism and rise to walk in newness of life we are no longer servants of sin but of righteousness. Water Baptism is the public and clear identification of that experience with the Lord Jesus, saying to every person, principality and power, "My sins are gone, I am free, I belong to Jesus, and I will serve Him".

Each individual must act according to their own conscience before God, who alone knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, and if they believe they have believed on the Lord Jesus with all their hearts then nothing, not the opinion of any human being, whatever distinguished office they may hold within a church or denomination, should deny them water that they may be baptised calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. They will then have the testimony. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Amen.