

Baptism: The Transition from Death to Life

Col. 2:8-14

Introduction:

1. This passage places great emphasis on Christ.
 - a. His teaching stands in contrast to the philosophies and traditions of men (8).
 - b. In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells (9).
 - c. In Him believers are made complete (10a).
 - d. In Him we are circumcised with a circumcision made without hands (11).
2. Circumcision in the O.T. marked one as a member of the covenant community of God's people (Gen. 17). In Gen. 17:14 God said, that any uncircumcised male would be "cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."
3. But the circumcision of Col. 2 refers to baptism. It identifies it is the working of God that makes us alive with Christ.
4. There are many perspectives today about baptism.
 - a. Catholicism promotes what has become known as "baptismal regeneration," i.e., that the act itself distributes the grace of God to a person, thus even those who do not yet believe are baptized in order to be saved.
 - b. Various forms of Protestantism have other views. Some believe that it is essential to salvation; some believe that it is not. Some place such great importance upon it that they name their followers "Baptists."
5. Often we are asked, "Which of these views do you believe?" If we pick one or the other we are drawn into an academic debate. Such debate may actually distract us from the real issue: "What am I going to do when it comes to baptism? Am I going to be baptized or not?"
6. What does the Scripture say? How does it read to you? What are you going to do in light of what it says?
7. In this study we will look at some of the passages and make three observations about what the text says.

Discussion:

- I. The death of Christ is the **means** by which we are given new life (Col. 2:13-14).
 - A. "What do you mean when you say Christ is the means?"
 1. To describe something as the means is to define the way something is brought about.
 2. Ex. "I found my lost dog by means of an ad in the newspaper."
 3. The means is the agency or the method something is achieved.
 - B. The death of Christ is the action that secures our new life.
 1. The death of Christ cancels out the debt of sin that we owe (Col. 2:14).
 2. Rom. 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 3. The consequence of our sin is our death. Christ died for us, having paid the debt that we owe. Rom. 5:6-10 states it succinctly.
 4. Rom. 5:12ff elaborates. It compares Adam who introduced sin with Christ who took it away.

- C. Baptism is not the means by which new life is secured.
 1. This would seem to be the idea behind what Catholicism considers as “baptismal regeneration.”
 2. Some seem to have the idea that baptism is what secures forgiveness. They are willing to baptize even those who do not have the capacity to believe (infants).
 3. Getting people wet is not the means of forgiveness. Are we teaching baptism OR are we teaching Christ? Are we teaching people to be baptized OR are we teaching people to place their trust in Jesus Christ? I am amazed at the high fall out rate of those who are baptized and do not follow through in their relationship with the Lord. I realize that those that are baptized are like newborn babes, that they are especially vulnerable. We can expect some fall out, but perhaps some of the reason for the high fall out is that we have taught people to be baptized, but not taught them faith in Jesus Christ.

II. Baptism is the **time** at which we die to sin and begin to walk in newness of life (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:1ff).

- A. Col. 2:12 says that we are buried with Him in baptism and raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.
 1. Often we see baptism as something that people do. Indeed, there is something that people do. We go down into the water and emerge from the water.
 2. As important as this may be, it is the working of God that achieves the new life.
 3. “Are you meaning to say that God acts at the time of our baptism to raise us to new life?” That is exactly what I mean to say. “But I thought that God had acted through time and gave us Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins. I thought that was the “working of God” that is under consideration in this text.” Yes, that too!! But isn’t this text saying that just as God raised Jesus from the dead that he raises us? Was there no direct work by God to raise Jesus? Is there no direct work by God to raise us?
- B. Rom. 6:1ff also defines baptism as a transition point taking us from death to newness of life.
 1. The reasoning in Rom. 6 is that we cannot continue on in sin because we have been baptized. Note vs. 12-13, especially.
 2. It says since we have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death our old self was crucified with Him. If we have died with Him and thus died to sin, we are now alive to God in Christ Jesus. Baptism is the transition point between death and life.
- C. It is a form of new birth (Jn. 3:5).
 1. Of water and the Spirit founded upon belief in Jesus Christ as the means of eternal life (3:16-18). If one does not believe there is no motive for baptism (Mk. 16:15-16).
 2. It is God’s work through the Spirit that brings about the new birth (Titus 3:5). It is not on the basis of deeds that we have done. Even our faith is not a sufficient deed to be the basis of our new birth, much less our repentance, our confession, our baptism.
 3. God is the one who gives the new life at the **time** of our submission to Him in baptism.
- D. Some say, “I don’t think getting wet saves a person.” If I understand the Scriptures, getting wet doesn’t save a person. God does the saving. He does it by **means** of having paid the penalty for our sin. He raises us to life at the **time** of our baptism.

III. Baptism saves through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:21).

- A. Throughout Scripture God has called on people to recognize that He is the only one who has the power to raise the dead.
 - 1. This is the truth that Abraham recognized when he offered Isaac on the altar (Heb. 11:19).
 - 2. The resurrection of Christ is proof positive of God's power to raise the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-17).
- B. Rom. 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."
 - 1. It is our belief in God's power to raise the dead that leads to our salvation.
 - 2. Baptism saves because we believe God raised Jesus from the dead and that He will raise us from the dead when we are joined together with Him in death and resurrection in baptism.
- C. 1 Pet. 3:21 says, "Baptism now saves you."
 - 1. We may not understand how it does it.
 - 2. We may not comprehend why God would say this.
 - 3. We may not understand the relationship between baptism and the resurrection of Christ.
 - 4. But the text does say, "Baptism now saves you." Will we make it say, "Baptism DOES NOT save you?"
 - 5. If that is what we are doing we need to try to understand what Peter IS saying.
 - a. I don't believe he is saying that baptism is the means of salvation. Christ is the means.
 - b. I don't believe that he is saying that baptism itself saves, as if it were some kind of meritorious work that saved.
 - c. I don't believe that he is saying that baptism replaces faith or repentance or confession.
 - d. I don't believe he is saying that baptism obligates God to save us.
 - e. I believe he is saying that because of our belief in God's power to raise the dead, as demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, baptism saves because we trust in God to raise us to life.

Conclusion:

- 1. If indeed baptism is the time of the transition from death to life what does that mean for those who refuse it?
- 2. If in our baptism we "cut off" sin as the circumcision of Christ what does it mean if we refuse it?
- 3. If in our baptism we confess God's power to raise the dead what does it mean for those who refuse it?
- 4. If in your baptism you are saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ what does it mean if you refuse it?
- 5. Ananias asked Saul, "Why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16).