

Baptism into Christ

A Study on Romans 6:3-4a

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If someone were to ask me which words in the Bible are the most difficult to define and explain, I would reply, “‘In’ and ‘into.’” Our text in this lesson says that we Christians were “baptized into Christ.” In the New Testament, especially in the epistles, the words “in Christ,” “in whom,” “into Christ,” “in him,” and “in Christ Jesus” occur over and over, expressing the fact that the Christian has been baptized into Christ or put in union with Christ. While the concept of union with Christ is difficult to define, it is the key to Christianity and progressive victory over sin in our daily lives. The prepositions, “in” and “into” must be important, for they are used over two hundred times in the New Testament and 164 times by Paul alone.

In this lesson we will focus on the words, “baptized into Jesus Christ.” Without a knowledge of this concept, it is impossible to live an effective Christian life.

REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

When asked whether it were possible for a truly regenerate person to go on living in sin after trusting in Jesus Christ, Paul’s first answer was an emotional, “God forbid!” Although the Bible and experience prove to us that the Christian does do acts of sin after salvation, the Christian cannot be dominated by the sin nature, nor can he be a slave to it as he was before conversion to Christ. This would be unthinkable, untenable and blasphemous. Salvation demands a life of progressive sanctification; there must be change.

Paul’s second answer was a question, “How shall we who have died to sin live any longer in it?” The Christian cannot live as a slave to the sin nature because he has died to the sin nature. The Christian was in Christ when Christ died for sin on the cross. There, God judged the sin nature of the Christian and broke its power so that the Christian no longer has to obey the sin nature as he did when unsaved. God has provided a way for the Christian progressively to defeat sin in his life. He wants the Christian to know that he has died to sin in Christ, and that although sin still remains in him, it can no longer reign over him. With this attitude and the help of the Holy Spirit, the Christian can begin to live a life of progressive victory over sin.

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT — Romans 6:3-4a

“Know ye not.” Many of the Roman Christians were ignorant of the fact that they had been baptized into Christ, being put into a living, vital and organic union with Christ, sharing both his death to sin and his resurrection to life. That people can even think of asking whether Christians are free to sin shows a complete lack of understanding of what a Christian is and of what Spirit baptism is. A Christian is not merely a justified believer. He is someone who has entered into a vital, personal union with Jesus Christ.

“That so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” Paul wants to show how a Christian has actually died to sin — to show that a Christian has been baptized into Christ’s death, that he is a sharer of that death to sin. This baptism has nothing to do with water, but is a spiritual baptism, an actual act that places a person into Christ. Water baptism is a physical act that cannot mechanically put a person into Christ, although some people believe that it does. Others agree that baptism here refers to Spirit baptism, while seeing water baptism as the outward sign of Spirit baptism.

The Meaning of Baptism: Most commentators agree that the meaning of the word “baptize” frequently means “dip.” While this may be a primary meaning of “baptize,” the word also has other meanings, one being “identify.” There are many places in the New Testament where “baptize” cannot mean “dip.” Some of them are:

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall *baptize* you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Matt. 3:11).

“But I have a baptism to be *baptized* with; and now am I straitened till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50).

“One, Lord, one faith, one *baptism*” (Eph. 4:5).

“And were all *baptized* unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2).

In Romans 6 baptism refers to Spirit baptism when a person is identified with Christ or put into union with him, sharing in his death.

The Fact of Spirit Baptism: The Christian shares the death of Christ to sin through union with him, and this comes about by the baptizing work of the Spirit:

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized 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” (1 Cor. 12:13).

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27).

Spirit baptism happened to every Christian the moment he believed. It is a fact, actual and positional, and it has results in a Christian’s experience. It is positional in that it is true of every believer, and mystical in that it results in experience in the life of every true child of God. The Christian shares in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because of his union with Christ.

The Purpose of Spirit Baptism: The moment one believes on Christ, the Holy Spirit identifies that person with Christ, and puts him in union with Christ so that he becomes one with Christ. He becomes one spirit with the Lord: “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). Thus, the Christian shares Christ’s death to sin and his resurrected life. Union with Christ is the closest kind of relationship. It is like the blacksmith putting an iron in the fire. The iron gets in the fire and the fire gets into the iron. There is an interpenetration of the elements. We are not to think of ourselves as just united to Christ in some vague, general sense. We have been identified with him and made one with him.

The Actuality of Spirit Baptism: This was a conceptual fact in the mind of God in eternity: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). It happened as a fact at the Cross: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). It became an actuality to the experience of the believer at conversion through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as we see from the verses we have been dealing with in this lesson.

CONCLUSION

The Apostle Paul lived in light of the fact that he had died to sin in Christ:

“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” (Gal. 2:20).

He clearly understood that the power of the sin nature had been broken at the Cross, and that it became an actuality for him at his conversion when he was put into union with Christ. While Paul knew he would do acts of sin at times, he was not ignorant of the truth that he

no longer had to be a slave to the sin nature. Sin remained in him, but would never again reign over him. Paul knew he could begin to defeat sin progressively in his life because God had broken its power in him. We too must live in light of the fact that we have positionally died to sin in Christ.

Many years ago a missionary who sailed from England for the African coast had to change at Lagos from his ship to a costal tub going to the fever-infested spot where he was to pour out his life for the Lord. A trader protested, "If you go to that place you will die!"

The man of God replied, "I died before I left London.

Every Christian is a dead man when it comes to sin, self and the world, having died positionally at the Cross and actually at conversion. We are to live our lives believing that we are dead men!

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour, you need to trust him for salvation. When you do this, at that very moment, the Holy Spirit will put you into union with Christ, and you will share his death to sin and his resurrection power unto life. Without Christ, you are dead spiritually. With Christ, you will become spiritually alive and experience the resurrected and living Christ in your everyday life.