

After Baptism What?

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We have heard time after time that baptism is "for the remission of sins," and so it is (Acts 2:38). Preachers nearly always end their sermons with an appeal to be baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins. I find no fault with that. However, most of the time the impression is conveyed that after baptism one is on the road to heaven and he does not have to worry about anything else. With that explanation, most baptized believers retire immediately and enjoy life with the expectation of eternal life when they die. It seems there is no work to be done, no obligations to anyone for anything; most of all, no obligation to Christ to do anything in his service. How this idea evolved and became so prevalent is a mystery to me. Elders are responsible to a great extent. Preachers and teachers must share the responsibility for the lack of knowledge of the work of baptized believers; and parents in the church must also share the culpability. That is not what the word of God teaches. Rather than being the end of salvation, it is the beginning of a new life in Christ.

A number of passages from the New Testament clearly set forth the obligations and responsibilities of everyone who has been scripturally baptized into Christ. Those who are baptized into Christ are "raised to walk in newness of life." That statement encompasses about every phase of one's life. "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" (Romans 6:4).

Romans 6 gives a rather clear picture of the transition of alien sinners: "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12), from sinful captivity to being at peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Notice these words and their relationship to sin and freedom from sin in Christ.

1. ***The old man of sin is crucified.*** That signifies to be put to death; one who is "crucified" is painfully put to death. The "old man" is that man of sin who is put to death. Death is the cessation of life. When life leaves the body, the body is said to be "dead." "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). The Old man that is crucified is that person who is guilty of sins through his life that has separated him from God. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

The crucifixion of the old man is to "destroy the body of sins" - to remit all the sins in one's life to that point. This occurs at baptism when preceded by all other conditions that makes baptism valid in the plan of God for the forgiveness of sins.

2. ***The old man is dead.*** We are "raised up from the dead" describes the condition of one before he is "raised" from the burial of baptism (Romans 6:4). "For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Romans 6:7). Not only does that signify that one is free from his sins, it also signifies that he cannot continue to live any longer in those sins.

We must first be dead to sin before we can live the new life with Christ. "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the

dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:8-11).

Again, the Holy Spirit said: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13). This describes the condition of one who is in his sins and away from Christ. He is dead: he is without the life of Christ. Every person who is dead in this sense is without the life of Christ and cannot escape hell.

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). This signifies the relationship we have with our sinful life as we come to obey Christ for the remission of our sins. First, we quit sin. We become dead to sin; we no longer live in sin. Genuine repentance is when and where we die to sin. We do not have life at this point because we have not been "raised to walk in newness of life."

3. ***The old man is buried.*** We bury dead people. It is a crime to bury a living person. That is one reason why baptizing a "saved, living person" is a crime against Christ. If he is dead to sin, he is a fit candidate for baptism. Some doctrines of men claim that one is saved by faith only, at the point of faith, before he is baptized. I have moderated in debates that discussed that proposition.

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death . . ." (Romans 6:4). Another figure is used to describe this very act. "For if we are planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:5). "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

4. ***The new man is raised.*** Resurrection is essential to the life of one who is dead. No dead person ever lived or ever will live without a resurrection from the dead. And one will never be raised unless he is dead. Being dead to sin means to cease from sin. Sin does not continue to live in the one who is dead to sin. No one can be raised to walk in newness of life until and unless he has ceased from sin (died to sin).

We are raised to "walk in newness of life." We are, at that point, new creatures in Christ: a life free from the guilt of sin. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). "Raised" to walk in newness of life imposes certain obligations that maintain that life in Christ. I do not see how one would any more continue to live in sin after being raised from the dead by baptism, than one who is dead physically can continue to live after he dies physically. That is the point in the figure of death, resurrection and life in baptism for the remission of sins.

5. ***We become instruments of righteousness.*** Righteousness has several synonyms, among which is devout and pious. Righteousness is defined by the word of God in a way that helps us apply it to one who is raised from the grave of baptism.

Speaking of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, the Holy Spirit said: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). In the house of Cornelius Peter said: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). "All unrighteousness is sin . . ." (1 John 5:17). "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

6. ***We Become servants of righteousness.*** "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17). At this point, one must not yield his members as instruments of unrighteousness, but rather yield his members to do righteousness. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but rather yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:12-13).

After scriptural baptism one begins a new life in Christ. Sadly, many die in infancy. They return back to the sinful life they lived before they were born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:3,5). It may result from lack of nourishment and exercise, or it may result from infectious diseases of sin that destroy the life of a believer. The sad and miserable picture of one who has departed from the faith once delivered is given in Hebrews 6:4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."