

## HE SHALL BAPTIZE YOU

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God created the first man, Adam, able to sin. He created him able to sin, and He gave him a commandment by which to test him. He placed him and Eve his wife in the garden of Eden, and He permitted them to eat from any tree in the garden, but He forbade them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned him that, if they disobeyed, they would die. Because God is perfectly holy, one sin a man commits is sufficient cause for God to condemn him. The man failed his probation. The serpent lured Eve to sin, and she ate, and she led Adam her husband to eat. Adam and his wife disobeyed God's commandment, and ate from the tree, so God expelled them from the garden, and barred them and all their posterity from eating from the tree of life. God promised, however, that one of their descendents would destroy the serpent and his works. Adam brought death, not only to himself, but to all mankind. Moreover, Adam's nature changed from one free to sin to one bound to sin, and everyone of his descendents is born with this sinful nature. Every man comes into the world both condemned by God, and opposed to Him. They come into the world both guilty and corrupt, and, apart from the grace of God, they perish. A man cannot atone for his sins; he cannot compensate for them; he cannot counterbalance them. He needs both forgiveness and new life.

The descendants of Adam and Eve, true to their nature, sinned against God. They sinned against Him so grievously that God finally destroyed them all. He did not destroy all of mankind without exception, however, for, if He had done, there would have been no descendent of Adam and Eve to destroy the serpent. True to His word, and in His grace, He preserved Noah and his family. Moreover, He made a covenant with Noah as the new head of mankind that He would never again destroy the world. He would rather save it. (Genesis 6-9)

A few hundred years after the Great Flood, mankind refused to disperse as God had commanded them, so God confused their language, thereby compelling them to do so. (Genesis 11) From these scattered peoples, various nations arose, and from among them God chose one man, Abraham, with whom to make a covenant. He promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation, and that they would well in the land of Canaan. Moreover, He promised Abraham that by one of his descendents all of the nations of the world would be blessed. (Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22) He did also say that his descendents would be enslaved by another nation, and freed after four-hundred years.

The children of Israel were put under bondage in Egypt, and they cried out to God for relief. God heard their cries, and, for the sake of His covenant with the patriarchs, He delivered them. After He delivered them, He made a covenant with them through Moses. In this covenant He promised life to them that obeyed His law, and He threatened death to them that did not. God promised them, saying, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them." (Leviticus 18:5) He also threatened them, saying, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." (Deuteronomy 27:26) Some misunderstand the Mosaic covenant, and the purpose of the law. God gave the law to the children of Israel first of all to reveal to them what God is like, and what He expected from them. Jesus said that the greatest commandment in the law is this: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might;" and the second is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:34-40) The law of Moses is but an application of these two commandments. Because men are sinful, however, the law serves another purpose: it exposes man's sinful nature. Sinful men do

not merely fail to obey the law of God; they rebel against it. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “For by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20) He confessed that the law provoked him to sin because, although the law is not sinful, he was. He wrote, “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” (Romans 7:7, 8) So, a good man would have confessed, not only his sins, but his inability. Some in Israel, however, prided themselves on their keeping the law, and even added to it. Yet, although they took pains to keep some of the commandments, their hearts were far from God.

It was a matter of course that the children of Israel would break God’s law. Yet, God did not destroy a man if he committed a sin. God revealed Himself to Moses as merciful, gracious, and longsuffering. (Exodus 34:6) So, God in His law included the system of animal sacrifices by which He would forgive the sins of those who repented. The Mosaic covenant promised life for obedience, and warned of death for disobedience. The law of Moses told the children of Israel what God required them to do, and it told them what God required them to do when they failed. The law of Moses is good, but it is inadequate either to forgive sins or to empower sinful men to keep it. God required that the people sacrifice animals to atone for their sins, but, as Saint Paul explained to the Hebrews, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4) The penalty for a man’s sins his death. The animal sacrifices were only a stop-gap. Moreover, the law of Moses comprises commandments. It tells people what to do, but it does not give them power to do it. The Ten Commandments were at first words written in stone; Moses committed the law to writing. However, the law cannot empower the people to obey; rather, it provokes sinful people to sin. Saint Paul described his experience as a zealous Jew living under the law: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” (Romans 7:15) Saint Paul called the law “holy,” and the commandments “holy, and just, and good.” (Romans 7:12) He called the Mosaic covenant itself “glorious,” but, because of its practical effect on sinners, he also called it “the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones,” and also, “the ministration of condemnation.” (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9)

The Old Covenant was not adequate to give the people forgiveness and power to keep the law. So, God promised them a New Covenant, one which would be adequate for those things (Hebrews 8:7-13). Through Jeremiah the prophet God said:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

The law could not give the people power to obey; neither could it give them real forgiveness when they failed. Yet, God did promise that He would one day give them both. According to the prophet Isaiah, there would come one who would give His life to atone for the sins of the people. He said:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

What is more, God would give the people power to obey His law. The prophet Ezekiel said:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

God would change the hearts of His people. He would put His Spirit within them, and that Spirit would make them both willing and able to obey His law. Saint Paul, after describing his experience as a devout Jew failing to keep the law of Moses, wrote:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 7:1-4)

Those who put their faith in Christ are not condemned, because their sins are forgiven, and the Spirit gives them power to obey the law, however imperfectly. In this way the New Covenant is superior to the Old.

When John the Baptist was preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, some thought he might be the Christ. He said:

I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. (Luke 3:16, 17)

John denied that he was the Christ, and he said that the Christ was far greater than he. The Christ would be the difference between life and death, between reward and punishment, between heaven and hell. John baptized with water, but Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in His lifetime, told His disciples that He would one day leave them, but He would send them the Spirit. (John 15:16) After Jesus ascended into Heaven, He received the Holy Spirit, and then sent Him into the world. (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:33) Under the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit came upon some of God's people, but not upon all, and He came upon them only temporarily. Under the

New Covenant, the Spirit comes upon all of God's people, and permanently. It is the Spirit who joins a man to Christ, and who joins one Christian to another. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit finally came, and He came first to Jesus's followers, who were Jews. From that point onward, anyone who believed in Jesus received the Holy Spirit. Saint Peter told a crowd of Jews and proselytes to repent and believe in Jesus. He told 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. 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." (Acts 2:38, 39) Some time later, Saint Peter went to the house of some Gentile converts to the Jewish religion, and He told them to believe in Jesus. When they did believe in Jesus, the Spirit fell upon them just as He had fallen upon the disciples in the beginning. Some time after this, Saint Paul went to Ephesus, and there He found some disciples. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and they answered that they did not know the Holy Spirit had come. He asked them which baptism they received, and they said that they had been baptized by John the Baptist. Saint Paul said that John the baptist commanded people to believe in one who would come after Him, and He said that that one is Jesus. Saint Paul then administered to them Christian baptism, and when he laid his hands upon them, they received the Holy Spirit. So, at a time twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, and in a place over one-thousand miles away from Jerusalem, there were devout Jews who had not yet believed that Jesus is the Christ. Although the New Covenant was put into effect at the death of Jesus, the Old Covenant remained in effect until the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus baptizes some with the Holy Spirit, but the rest, John the Baptist said, He baptizes with fire. That is to say, he baptizes them with the fire of punishment. The Son of God came into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. He is now in heaven, but He will one day return to judge mankind. He will be like the farmer who harvests wheat: after gathering the wheat stalks from the field, he places them on the threshing floor. There he thrashes them, loosening the kernels of wheat from their worthless husks. Then with a winnowing fork he tosses the wheat into the air. The wheat falls to the ground, and the chaff blows away. John the Baptist said that Jesus is ready with His winnowing fork. He has ascended into heaven, but He will one day return to separate wheat from chaff. The wheat He will keep for Himself, but the chaff He will forever burn with fire. Jesus either baptizes a man with the Holy Spirit, or He baptizes him with fire. (Luke 3:15-17)

Let us thank God that we live under a new and better covenant, one in which we have forgiveness of sins, and new life by the Spirit. Let us thank God for giving His Son a sacrifice for our sins. Let us thank the Father and the Son for sending us the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ, so that we have forgiveness, and strength to obey God. Let us always confess our sins, and let always walk by the Spirit, that we may not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

And now to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons and One God, be ascribed by us, and by the whole Church, as is most due, the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.