

CHRISTOLOGY (46)

Then the Davidic kingdom will be realized (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 19:15, 20). Then the Priest will sit on His throne, bringing to this earth the long-awaited Golden Age (Psalm 100)” (Ryrie, p. 259).

In thinking of Christ holding the offices of prophet, priest and king, Dr. Walvoord concluded his study of this by writing the following: “Taken together, the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king are the key to the purpose of the incarnation. His prophetic office was concerned with the revelation of the truth of God; the priestly office was related to His work as Savior and Mediator; His kingly office had in view His right to reign over Israel and over the entire world. In Christ the supreme dignity of these offices is reached” (Walvoord, p. 137).

QUESTION #18 – What is the significance of the baptism of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps no matter concerning Jesus Christ has been misunderstood or misinterpreted more than His baptism. We agree with Dr. Chafer who writes: “No phase of the life of Christ on earth is more misunderstood than His baptism. This misunderstanding is evidence by the wide variety of more or less contradictory meanings and modes assigned to it. It is obvious that, though all of these assigned meanings and modes might be untrue, not more than one of them could be true” (Vol. 5, p. 56). In following the basic outline of Dr. Chafer, we will ask and answer three important questions, which hopefully will give us a solid understanding of Christ’s baptism:

(Question #1) - By whom was Christ baptized?

Jesus Christ was baptized by John, the last of the O.T. prophets (Mt. 11:13), the greatest human born of a woman (Mt. 11:11), the one predicted and selected to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ (Is. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1; Mark 1:2-4; Lk. 1:13-17; Acts 19:4). This John is the one who baptized Jesus Christ and actually shied away from his responsibility of doing this (Mt. 3:13-15). John admitted that his baptism of water was far inferior to a future baptism of the Spirit (Jn. 1:19-34).

(Question #2) - Why was Christ baptized?

Before attempting to give meaning to the baptism of Jesus Christ, three important interpretive points must be considered:

1. Christ’s baptism must be interpreted in light of Christ’s own words, who specifically stated His baptism was “to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15).
2. Christ’s baptism must be interpreted in regard to O.T. Israel, not the N.T. Church (Mt. 10:6; 15:24; Jn. 1:31).
3. Christ’s emphasis is on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not the baptism of water (Mt. 3:11; John 3:5-8).

Unfortunately, these critical theological matters are oft times overlooked when attempting to interpret the meaning of Christ’s baptism in water. There are four main views given as to why Jesus was baptized by John:

CHRISTOLOGY (47)

View #1 - Jesus was receiving the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, completely identifying Himself with these sinners and actually substituting Himself for them as the One who later would sacrifice His own life for them.

Those who hold to this view claim the One without sin became sin for us and “was numbered with the transgressors” (Is. 52:12), thus this baptism was His mediatorial satisfaction in “fulfilling all righteousness.”

Dr. Chafer points out three main weaknesses with this view (Vol. 5, pp. 60-61):

1. No scriptural statement or support of this;
2. Christ’s substitutionary/mediatorial work is restricted to His sufferings and death on the cross;
3. This baptism is in direct connection to Him and His connection with Israel.

View #2 - Jesus Christ was identifying Himself in this baptism with the godly remnant of Israel who had responded to the preaching of John and did believe they needed to repent because their King was at hand.

The main weakness of this view is that there is no scriptural support for it.

View #3 - Jesus Christ was being set apart as the Messiah of Israel by this baptism.

Those who hold this view believe that in view of Daniel’s connection between the coming Messiah and righteousness (Dan. 9:24-25) and since Christ said this baptism was to “fulfill all righteousness,” this baptism identifies Him as Messiah and publically begins His messianic ministry.

This view does deal with the “righteousness” matter, but we must acknowledge there is no specific biblical ground of statements clearly stating this is the correct view. Many do cite John 1:31-33, however.

View #4 - Jesus Christ was receiving a baptism that signals that He is the Priest who had been appointed by God.

Those who hold to this view do so for the following reasons:

1. Three times concerning the life of Christ a voice from heaven is heard—His baptism, His transfiguration, His seating on the Davidic throne. His transfiguration emphasizes His office of prophet —“listen to Him” (Mt. 17:5). His future seating emphasized His office of King (Ps. 2:6-7). It is logical that His baptism emphasizes His office as priest (Mt. 16-17).
2. It is specifically stated in the context of His baptism that when He began His ministry to Israel He was “about thirty years of age,” an O.T. age specifically connected to being a Priest (Lk. 3:21-23; Num. 4:3). It is pointed out that this is the only public ministry that had an age limit. There is no age limit for a prophet or king; therefore, we may assume this is a priest.

CHRISTOLOGY (48)

3. It is specifically revealed in Matthew that Christ is of the tribe of Judah, not Aaron, which makes His priesthood an exception, like that of Melchizedek. It stands to reason that something very public and very unique will be done to consecrate Him as Priest (Mt. 1:2; Heb. 7:14-17).
4. It is required by Mosaic Law, which God wrote and which people of Israel were to be taught, that every priest must be ordained (i.e. Lev. 8:1-6; Ex. 29:1-9). Therefore, part of Christ fulfilling all of the Law and righteousness required that He be ordained as priest, which is what His water baptism did.
5. It was critical since Christ was not of the tribe of Judah and since most would reject His ministry that a public act of consecration and ordination occur which establishes Christ as a priest. The voice from heaven at His baptism clearly sanctions Him, even though the priesthood of the day would not sanction Him, thus thwarting His plan to fulfill all legal righteousness which required a priest be ordained.

(Question #3) – What is the direct relationship between the baptism of Jesus Christ and the baptism of the N.T. believer?

The answer to this question, which most do not realize is none ! There is no direct connection between the two and to miss this is to misunderstand important doctrine. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes: "...there is no direct relation existing between the baptism of Christ and the baptism of the believer" (Vol. 5, p. 63).

1. When we, as a sinner, come to faith in Jesus Christ, we, in no way "fulfill all righteousness." In fact, there is nothing in us that is good or righteous, except for God's gracious work in our lives.
2. We, as believers, may follow Christ in a moral or spiritual act, but we cannot ever follow Christ in an official act. For example, there are people in Mexico who think they must follow Christ and be nailed to a cross. This is precisely the point of fulfilling all righteousness—it is that which we as sinners could not officially do.

It is very confusing when some say "we follow Christ in baptism." In all reality, His baptism is something we cannot follow. Again we cite Dr. Chafer—"It is even more clear that Christ's baptism as accomplished by John is not Christian baptism, and the oft repeated injunction to "follow Christ in baptism" is both unfounded and misleading. Christians may follow Christ in moral or spiritual issues, but not in official acts; and Christ's baptism involved no moral principle other than it wrought out the peculiar obligation which rested upon Him. The law which engendered this obligation could never apply to a believer in the present age" (*Ibid.*, p. 64).

In all reality, most who say "follow the Lord or Christ in baptism" have no idea what they theologically mean. Typically, what is really meant by this is: 1) Be baptized in water like Jesus was; 2) Be immersed in water like we think Jesus was.

CHRISTOLOGY (49)

The truth is when it comes to Jesus Christ it cannot be proved that He was immersed. A number of years ago, John Goff, a brilliant lawyer who loved the Lord, was asked whether, had there been a law in John's day prohibiting dipping as the mode of baptism, he could convict John on existing evidence and biblical data. He naturally assumed he could, but on careful research he concluded his evidence was actually less than circumstantial (John Goff, *How Was Jesus Baptized and Why?*).

If we keep in mind that Christ's baptism is related to the O.T. priesthood, water used in the baptism and the Holy Spirit replacing oil (Mt. 3:16), the mode applicable to Christ would be sprinkling, not immersing (Ex. 29:4, 7). In fact, some commentators believed had Christ been immersed, it would have been a violation of the Law, not a fulfillment of it. (See Chafer, Vol. 5, pp. 65-66.)

Those who believe Jesus Christ was immersed typically neglect the meaning of His baptism. Those who even seriously study the issue usually base their argument on one verse and on one preposition in the verse. The verse is Mark 1:9. The preposition in the verse is "in," which literally is the Greek preposition "eis," which is oft times rendered "into." The truth is being baptized "into the Jordan" does not necessarily mean being "immersed into the Jordan." It is noteworthy to point out in Mark 1:8 that the preposition "with" is the Greek preposition "en" which means in, with or by. It is perfectly legitimate to think Christ went into the Jordan with John and John took some water and put it on Him, because water was the means by which Jesus was ordained a Priest.

Dr. Chafer cites Drs. Dale and Wilson, two biblical scholars and grammarians, on this point: "The preposition eis, with a word supposed to signify the baptizing element, forms the regimen of baptize, in one solitary occurrence. The unique exception to which we refer is found in Mark 1:9, 'He was baptized of John in Jordan.' On this construction great stress has been laid, as if it necessarily affirmed that our blessed Lord was dipped into the river of Israel. ... We are not disposed, however, to surrender to our opponents the preposition "eis" in this important testimony. Supported by the authority of New Testament usage, we maintain that in numerous constructions, several of them closely parallel to the example before us, "eis" is employed where motion is not indicated by the verb with which it stands connected, and where, therefore, the rendering into is totally incompatible with the existing syntax. Bruder, in his Concordance to the Greek Testament, enumerates not fewer than 65 instances of this construction; among them he includes the text under discussion."

Dr. Dale lists six false assumptions one makes if one dogmatically holds that Christ was immersed into the Jordan according to Mark 1:9:

1. The assumption that "eis" only means into and not unto as in so many places.
2. That the Jordan refers to water and not locality.
3. That baptize in Jordan can only mean immersed into water rather than baptized in the Jordan Valley.
4. That the word "baptize" is used here in a primary, literal emphasis of immersing whereas in so many other places it is used to figuratively and symbolically refer to something else.

CHRISTOLOGY (50)

5. That the word “baptize” must only mean to dip when in so many other places it cannot literally mean this.
6. That Mark is giving us a better and fuller representation than the other writers of what actually happened.

It is probable, in view of the presence of the Holy Spirit after Christ was baptized by John (Mt. 3:16), that the meaning of Christian baptism must be discovered in regard to the Holy Spirit, not in regard to the baptism of Jesus Christ.

We know from a study of Scripture that at the moment one believes, one is baptized by the Spirit into Christ, thus completely identifying that believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1ff). Therefore, our baptism is not following Christ; it is illustrating what the Holy Spirit has done in putting us into Christ. Christ’s water baptism is not Christian baptism and never should be viewed as such. (For an excellent and thorough discussion of this issue, see Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 5, pp. 56-73.)

QUESTION #19 – What will Jesus Christ do in the future?

Although a deep analysis and study of this falls under the doctrine of Eschatology, the doctrine of future events, it is legitimate to at least outline the future ministry of Christ when studying the doctrine of Christology. In capsule form, to understand what Christ will do in the future, we must isolate three separate groups to see what Christ will do for each one:

(Group #1) - What Christ will do in the future in regard to the Church.

(Group #2) - What Christ will do in the future in regard to Israel.

(Group #3) - What Christ will do in the future in regard to unbelievers.

Group #1 - What Christ will do in the future in regard to the Church.

When the N.T. believer thinks in terms of the future concerning himself, he will have a good perspective of what Jesus Christ will do in regard to Him by remembering the four words, which begin with the letter “R”: 1) Rapture ; 2) Resurrection ; 3) Reward ; 4) Reign .

(Event #1) - The Rapture of the Church.

The Rapture of the Church may be understood as that moment in time when Christ will appear in the sky and in a moment and in the twinkling of an eye He will catch up His Church in the air, taking it to be with Him forever. There are many texts of Scripture which speak or refer to this event:

1. John 14:3- given by Christ in the Upper Room Discourse which discusses the Grace Age that will feature the Holy Spirit.
2. I Cor. 15:51-52- In this context, “the last trumpet” refers to the last moment of the Church Age, which probably will feature the word “come up here” (Rev. 4:1).
3. I Thess. 4:13-17- the most famous rapture passage. The word “rapture” is derived from a Latin word for “caught up” in verse 17.

CHRISTOLOGY (51)

4. II Tim. 4:1- both “His appearing” and “His kingdom” contain an article in Greek, indicating these are two separate events which are to be distinguished in the future program of God.
5. I John 2:28- the future event for the church is described as Christ’s “appearing,” which supports the Rapture.
6. Rev. 3:10- the Church is promised to be kept “out of” a time of trouble that will come against the “whole world,” which clearly supports a “Pre-tribulation Rapture” position.

This is the next event that will happen in the prophetic program of God. Presently, the stage is being set and nothing further needs to happen prior to the Rapture. The Rapture of the Church will do three things: 1) End the Church Age; 2) Signal to the world that something is now happening in the program of God; 3) Begin the Great Tribulation.

(Event #2) - The Resurrection of the Church.

The resurrection of the Church may be understood as that moment of time when believers in this N.T. age, who have died before the Rapture occurs, will be raised up with their new glorified bodies. Presently, a believer who dies is instantly with the Lord (II Cor. 5:8). This believer, however, does not get his new, final glorified body until the resurrection of the Church, which will occur in the moment and twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15:52). In the specific chronology of events, the resurrection of those dead in Christ occurs just prior to the rapture of those who are alive. I Thess. 4:16-17 gives a numerical chronology to this event which is clearly supported by I Cor. 15:51-52.

(Event #3) - The Rewards of the Church.

It is clear that every believer will stand before Jesus Christ to be judged by Him. This judgment will not determine heaven or hell; it will determine rewards or loss of rewards:

1. Rom. 14:10 – here the judgment of believers is called the “judgment seat of God.”
2. I Cor. 3:10-15 – a believer gains or loses rewards, but is still saved even if losing rewards.
3. I Cor. 4:1-5 – a believer’s judgment will be at a specific moment of time in the future.
4. I Cor. 9:24-27 – the possibility of winning rewards kept Paul focused to the end of his life.
5. II Cor. 5:10 – here the judgment of believers is called “the judgment seat of Christ.” When compared to Rom. 14:10—the name of the seat proves Jesus is God!
6. II Tim. 4:8 – a reward given to the faithful believer who loves the appearing of Christ. A reward system is operative and believers who will love His appearing are those living for Him.
7. I John 2:28 – Two kinds of believers will be raptured—those confident; those ashamed.

It is not specifically stated when this judgment occurs. Most Bible students believe it will occur immediately after the Rapture. I John 2:28 connects the event of Christ’s appearing with having shame or confidence as does I Corinthians 4:5. However, II Corinthians 5:10 speaks of the Judgment Seat of Christ in the context of the death of a believer. When we look at Hebrews 13:17, it is legitimate to think that this judgment will occur when all believers are with Christ, which does not happen until the Rapture.