

**(Matt. 3:11)** - John had stated clearly that all who are truly saved by God's grace in and by the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will surely bear fruits worthy of true repentance (Matt. 3:8). All others would be cut down by the just wrath of God (Matt. 3:10). Both faith and repentance are gifts from God given to His people through the Lord Jesus Christ and applied by the power of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. This is totally a sovereign and powerful work of God without any help from man (John 1:12-13). It is a necessary work without which no sinner would believe in Christ and repent (John 3:3-7; 1 Cor. 2:14-16). Here, John called it the baptism of *"the Holy Ghost, and with fire,"* meaning the Holy Spirit's work with Divine power (cf. Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). John made a distinction between this work of the Spirit in the new birth and the ordinance of confession we know as baptism *"with water."* John could baptize them with water, but he had no power to baptize them *"with fire,"* i.e. with the power of Christ by the Holy Ghost Who alone gives God's people spiritual life and new hearts to believe in Christ and repent of dead works and idolatry. John openly admitted that he had no power to baptize with fire but that only Christ could do this - *"but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear."*

Our Lord gave two ordinances to His church - baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither are necessary for salvation nor means of salvation. Baptism in water is a confession of a work already done, not by the confessing sinner, but by God. It is a confession of faith in Christ and a public identification with Him (Matt. 28:19). The Lord's Supper is a memorial of a work already done, not by the remembering sinner, but by Christ alone in His obedience unto death (1 Cor. 11:24-26). In our text, John was baptizing those who acknowledged their sinfulness, realized their need of salvation, and had confidence in the Messiah to save them from their sins. Only those who have been brought by God to faith in Christ and true repentance are to be baptized. There is not one instance in the Bible of an infant or someone who does not profess to believe in Christ ever being baptized (Acts 16:30-33; 19:4-5). When the Ethiopian asked Philip, *"Here is water; what doeth hinder me to be baptized"* (Acts 8:36), Philip's response was, *"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest"* (Acts 8:37).

Baptism is by immersion, not pouring or sprinkling. The word "baptism" means "placed into." It is a picture and confession of a believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. When our Lord was baptized, it is said that He *"went up straightway out of the water"* (Matt. 3:16), showing that He was immersed under the water and raised up out of it. Peter wrote that baptism for a believer is *"the answer of a good conscience toward God"* (1 Pet. 3:21). It does not give us peace with God nor wash away our sins, for only the blood of Christ can do that (Col. 1:20; Heb. 10:19-22). Baptism does, however, give a heart-peace in knowing that we have obeyed and honored the Lord God and confessed before men that we have been saved by grace and that Christ alone is all our salvation.

**(Matt. 3:12)** - The Lord Jesus will be the Judge of all men at the final judgment (John 5:22-23; Matt. 25:31-31), and He is the standard by which all men will be judged (Acts 17:30-31). He will bring His chosen, justified, redeemed, and called people into His immediate presence to be with Him forever (Rev. 21:3). The wicked will be judged condemned for their sins as such sins are imputed to them, and they will be burned *"with unquenchable fire."* This is why John urged his hearers to flee from the wrath to come, and the only place to flee is to run to Christ for all salvation, righteousness, and eternal life.

**(Matt. 3:13-14)** - Here, Matthew wrote of the baptism of our Lord. God's appointed time for our Savior to begin His public ministry on earth had come. His baptism marked this great

work. When John saw the Lord, he knew who He was. John admitted that he was not worthy to baptize the Lord of glory. John was aware of his own sinfulness, and he was aware that he stood before the Messiah Who was (and is) the righteous one whose coming he had been announcing. John surmised that Jesus was so high and holy that it would be needless for Him to be immersed in the baptism of repentance. Jesus Christ had nothing of which to repent. He was (and is) the sinless One Who came to put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. Our sins were imputed to Him by God in the everlasting covenant of grace, and He was (and is) our Surety Who came to die for our sins. But our sins were not imparted to Him. They did not corrupt or contaminate Him. He had no need of repentance of dead works as He did no dead works. All His works were pure and perfect. So, He had no sins to confess and no transgressions to turn away. He was truly “made sin” (2 Cor. 5:21a), but only by the legal transfer of the sins of God’s elect imputed to Him. But even having or sins imputed to Him, He remained “*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens*” (Heb. 7:26).

**(Matt. 3:15)** - Why, then, did Jesus come to be baptized? He answered the question - “*Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh Us to fulfil all righteousness.*” As our baptism is a confession of our sins having been put away by Christ as He died, was buried, and raised again because of our justification, Jesus’ baptism was a picture of His great work in dying, being buried, and resurrected to fulfill all righteousness for His people. His baptism pictured and foretold of His work for us in which He identified with us as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. John baptizing Jesus, in essence, was the preacher pointing to the Savior - “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). By baptizing Him, John was declaring to all then present that Jesus was the One they had been waiting for, the Son of God, the One he had predicted would baptize “*with the Holy Spirit and fire*” (Matt. 3:11). Notice how Jesus described His work on earth as a work “*to fulfill all righteousness*” (cf. Isa. 53:10-12; Dan. 9:24). This is the merit of His whole work of redemption and is the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel as Christ is God manifest in the flesh (Rom. 1:16-17). It is the righteousness that God has imputed to His chosen people whereby they stand justified before Him (Rom. 4:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:19-21). This is the righteousness of God in Christ from Whom God gives spiritual and eternal life to sinners who are by nature spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Prov. 12:28; Rom. 1:17; 5:17-21; 8:10).

**(Matt. 3:16-17)** - The Lord “*went up straightway out of the water*” because He had gone down into the water. This pictured His death, burial, and resurrection. This symbolic act testified that He would die for the sins of His people imputed to Him, be buried, and be raised again because His death was the fulfillment and establishment of righteousness whereby God could be just to justify the ungodly. He Who would lay down His life for His sheep would take it again unto Himself (John 10:18). Here in this act of baptism, we see the presence and the testimony of the Triune Godhead showing that in Christ, this glorious Person, dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). God the Father spoke in a heavenly declaration that the One Whom John had just baptized was (and is) His eternal, only begotten Son. The Lord Jesus submitted to the Father as the willing Servant of Jehovah. God the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to anoint Him for His great work as Prophet, Priest, and King. The Lord Jesus Christ was approved by the Father and empowered by the Spirit to do the work assigned Him in the covenant of grace (Matt. 1:21). Notice the further words of the Father - “*in Whom I am well pleased.*” The only way that God can be pleased with sinners like us is as we stand before Him in Christ - washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), and true faith looks to and pleads the righteousness that Christ fulfilled for His people.