

**THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM (Part Six)**  
**“Baptismal Regeneration Texts Examined” (Part 3)**

*Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5)*

*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16)*

*Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)*

*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16)*

*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)*

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27)*

*There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (I Peter 3:21)*

**INTRODUCTION:**

We continue now in our series on “The Symbolism of Baptism.” We have set forth the two contrasting views concerning the nature and usage of water baptism in the New Testament. We restate them again for purposes of review - they are:

(1) The view that baptism is a symbol of a deeper reality, namely the regenerating of new life into a person by the Holy Spirit making them a partaker of the righteousness found in the Gospel message of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Spiritual regeneration imparts faith and repentance which is then to be confessed outwardly in the waters of baptism.

(2) The second view is that baptism is a virtuous act in of itself wherein new life is imparted into the person by the act itself, or at the time of the act. Thus, baptism becomes the reality when in point of time regeneration and forgiveness of sins occurs. This is known as

sacramental grace or baptismal regeneration.

We will now continue to examine the various texts found in the Bible which are used by supporters of the baptismal regeneration view and see if they prove the position or not. We have already examined John 3:5; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; and Titus 3:5.

## **VI. GALATIANS 3:27 (NKJV)**

***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”***

The context of this verse takes place in Paul’s conflict with the Judaizers over the issue of whether the gospel of salvation was by grace through faith alone, or whether it was by faith plus the ritual of circumcision. He had emphasized that their justification and adoption unto sonship came by faith alone. In Galatians 2:16 he says, ***“knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”*** Also in Galatians 3:26, he states, ***“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** Paul was opposing a heresy that sought to add a religious ceremony (circumcision) to the completed work of Christ in order to complete one’s salvation. (cf. 3:1-5; 5:1-6). He insisted that from the cross of Christ flows all the blessings of eternal life and life in the Spirit (cf. 2:20; 3:13-14; 5:11; 6:14,15). Hearing and believing the message of the cross releases all the blessings which are stored in it.

Those who hold to baptism as being the point of time when salvation occurs, believe the text is saying that through the ceremony of baptism, one is placed into vital union with Christ, and partakes of His saving benefits. Thus faith and baptism become one and the same.

How strange would it be that Paul introduces a new ceremony (baptism) by which Christ’s saving work becomes effectual! Is he really saying to his opponents, “reject the heretical formula of hearing plus faith, plus circumcision, and replace it with hearing, plus faith, plus baptism? That would go against his purpose to establish that salvation is by faith alone. The baptism of the Galatian believers gave a physical presentation of the spiritual realities involved in faith. Faith is not a blind leap in the dark, but focuses on the resurrected Christ in His present position of living to make intercession for us. He gained that position through His work on the cross and subsequent resurrection from the dead. Thus when by faith we are said to ***“have put on Christ”*** or have ***“clothed ourselves with Christ,”*** our baptism illustrates the transaction as having actually taken place. Just as Abraham was justified by faith prior to his circumcision, the New Testament believer is justified by faith prior to his baptism, and not at the

point of or by his baptism. (cf. Romans 4:9-12).

Every aspect of the things essential to salvation has a moral connection between the character of God and the sinful person whom He saves. God operates through the influence of the Holy Spirit to bring about a moral disposition to the sinner. His word of truth operates to inform and prepare the mind for the right perceptions involved in such a change. Nothing of this sort can be attributed to the ceremony of baptism. Baptism was not an ordinance under the old covenant and yet people were saved in the Old Testament era. Neither the sacrifices nor the ceremonies possessed the efficacy to produce the moral transaction necessary for salvation (Hebrews 10:1-4). Therefore baptism symbolizes the saving transaction of God, but does not possess any saving ability residing in the act itself.

In our text before us, the expression “*enduo*” refers to the putting on of a garment or the wearing of clothes. It also appears in Romans 13:14 which reads, “***But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.***” This exhortation is not given to a sinner telling him to be baptized, but is given to Christians who have already been baptized. So baptism is not the only way to “***put on***” Christ. Romans 13:14 makes it clear that to “***put on***” Christ is to imitate or conform to Him. When we do so, our lives will be “***clothed***” with Christ’s likeness. So it is in baptism; we “***put on***” Christ by conforming to Him in the ordinance that declares Him to be the Savior of sinners. Thus when we are immersed in water, we imitate Him who was immersed in death for our sins. We thus “***put on***” Christ and our lives are “***clothed***” with Christ-likeness.

Romans 6:3-5 is a related text which can be interpreted in a similar manner. “***Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.***”

The word “*eis*” translated “***into***” again is the word that follows baptism and is to be understood in the same manner as in Acts 2:38 and Galatians 3:27. We are baptized (with reference to) His death. It does not mean “in order to obtain” His death. The expression “***buried with Him through baptism***” is obviously referring to the likeness set forth in baptism. Romans 6:4 uses the words “***just as*** (or like as) ***Christ***” and Romans 6:5 says “***in the likeness.***” This shows that baptism is a “likeness,” a symbolic representation, not the reality; it is a shadow, not the substance.

A further example of how the word “*eis*” is used, is located in I Corinthians 10:2. In verses 1 and 2 we read, ***“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that our fathers were under the cloud, and passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”*** Note the expression, ***“baptized into Moses.”*** The Church of Christ position is that in Galatians 3:27 that to be baptized into Christ means to “put on Christ” in a real and literal sense. In referring to Moses, when Paul says that Israel was ***“baptized into Moses”*** does he mean that they were “put into Moses? or if the word means “in order to obtain,” would Paul mean they were “baptized in order to obtain Moses?” That would be foolish.

As there are several meanings of “*eis*”, of which one is “in reference to,” then to be baptized (immersed) into Moses meant that the Israelites were baptized in the cloud and sea with a reference of identifying themselves with Moses and His authority and leadership. To be “baptized into Christ” simply means that the ceremony of baptism is a prefiguration of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ referring us to the fact that our sins were paid for by Him on the cross.

Colossians 2:12 is another text similar to Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3-5. I will merely quote the text, as the manner of interpreting it is the same as the previous texts. ***“Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”***

#### **VII. I PETER 3:21 (NKJV)**

***There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***

This is the last of a group of selected texts which I have chosen and are used to support the idea of baptismal regeneration or sacramental grace. The advocates of baptismal regeneration have these terms as primarily conveying the idea that God’s grace, which leads to spiritual life and forgiveness of sins, is conveyed through either the act of baptism itself, or that God acts in grace at the point of time when baptism occurs. Nearly all non Roman Catholics reject the Roman view that the act itself automatically bestows grace. But many non Roman Catholics possess views on baptism which are so close to the Roman view, they cannot escape the charge of holding to baptismal regeneration.

When the text states so clearly that it is “baptism which saves us,” the advocates of baptismal regeneration say, “There it is, clear and simple, what more needs to be said?”

Robert Kolb, a representative of the Lutheran view, says:

“Baptism . . . saves.” (I Peter 3:21). The Apostle Peter was direct and simple. The waters of the flood through which God had saved Noah serve as the “type,” or prophetic “representation” of what God was to do when he conveyed his promise to His people through His word in baptismal form. As an “antitype,” according to Peter’s use of the terminology of the biblical interpretation of his day, baptism fulfills what God promised to His Old Testament people. It gives salvation, that is, new life in Christ, to those “who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood.” (I Peter 1:2). Peter explained that baptism is no external kind of washing that simply removes dirt. It makes it possible for God’s chosen people to stand before Him with a good conscience. It does so through the resurrection of Christ. (I Peter 3:21).

Peter did not write these words because he believed that baptism is some sort of magical ritual, but because he regarded it as part of God’s re-creating, resurrecting, conversation with His fallen human creatures. This baptismal action of God, which combined His word with an external sign, was working in the fashion in which God’s word works in other forms as well.” (Robert Kolb, *Four Views on Baptism*, p. 91).

The Lutheran view is that God not only conveys His grace through faith in oral or written forms, but through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. More will be said about this in the next message. But let it be known that all of the views which see baptism as imparting some measure of grace are unanimous in rejecting the view that baptism is but a symbol of a deeper reality.

That being said, then what is Peter saying in the text now before us? In what manner does baptism save? The context is described in I Peter 3:18-22 where we read, ***“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in***

*the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”*

The point in this paragraph is to give a reason for suffering after one has done good. Verse 17 reads, *“For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”* Peter is writing to believers in Asia Minor who were once pagans, very much accepted in their culture. Now they were being slandered because they had become Christians. It seems as if the whole world was against them. Peter reminds them that the world was against Noah. He looked like a fool building the ark, but the majority were wrong and drowned in the flood. The minority, comprised of eight people (Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives) were the only ones saved, although they were saved through water. Peter then uses this Old Testament event as a type or symbol of how the Christian is saved through the waters of baptism.

The meaning of the passage takes shape in this manner. Peter speaks of the ark “wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved through or by water. The words, “were saved” are literally in the Greek – “were brought safely through.” The preposition “by” or “through” is known as a preposition of intermediate agency. That is, the souls in the ark were brought safely through the time of the flood by the intermediate agency or means of water. While it is true that it was the ark that saved them, yet Peter is not teaching that here. He says the waters of the flood saved them. They held up the ark above their destructive powers and saved those inside the ark. The very waters that were death to the rest of the human race, were life to those inside the ark.

The words *“the like figure”* or *“antitype”* are in the Greek *ho antitupon*. Do these words refer back to the word *“ark”* or the word *“water?”* Kenneth Wuest, in his *Word Studies In The Greek New Testament* sheds much light on what is complex in our English translations. He says,

The words “the like figure” are in the Greek *ho antitupon*. The question as to whether the word “figure” refers back to the word “ark” or the word “water,” is easily settled by the Greek grammar involved in this expression, for the relative pronoun *ho* is neuter, the word “ark” is feminine, and the word “water” neuter. The relative pronoun agrees with its antecedent in gender. Therefore the word “figure” which is neuter and construed grammatically with the pronoun *ho* goes back to the word “water.” The word

“figure” is the translation of *antitupon* which means “the counterpart of reality.” The Greek word “baptism” is in apposition with the word “figure.” Our translation so far reads, “Which (water) also (as a) counterpart now saves you, (namely) baptism.” Water baptism is clearly in the apostle’s mind, not the baptism by the Holy Spirit, for he speaks of the waters of the flood as saving the inmates of the ark, and in this verse, of baptism saving believers. But he says that it saves them only as a counterpart. That is, water baptism is the counterpart of the reality, salvation. It can only save as a counterpart, not actually. The Old Testament sacrifices were counterparts of the reality, the Lord Jesus. They did not actually save the believer, only in type. It is not argued here that these sacrifices are analogous to Christian water baptism. The author is merely using them as an illustration of the use of the word “counterpart.” So water baptism only saves the believer in type. The Old Testament Jew was saved before he brought the offering. That offering was only his outward testimony that he was placing his faith in the Lamb of God of whom these sacrifices were a type. The moment he conceived in his heart that he would bring his offering to the Tabernacle, his faith leaped the centuries to the time when God would offer the Sacrifice that would pay for his sin. Our Lord said, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). The act of bringing the sacrifice was his outward expression and testimony of his inward faith. Water baptism is the outward testimony of the believer’s inward faith. The person is saved the moment he places his faith in the Lord Jesus. Water baptism is his visible testimony to his faith and the salvation he was given in answer to that faith.

Peter is careful to inform his readers that he is not teaching baptismal regeneration, namely, that a person who submits to baptism is thereby regenerated, for he says, “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” Baptism, Peter explains, does not wash away the filth of the flesh, either in a literal sense as a bath for the body, nor in a metaphorical sense as a cleansing for the soul. No ceremonies really affect the conscience. But he defines what he means by salvation, in the words “the answer of a good conscience

toward God,” and he explains how this is accomplished, namely “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” in that the believing sinner is identified with Him in that resurrection.

So why does Peter bring up the topic of baptism in the context of Christian suffering? Negatively, not to have his readers think there is some saving or cleansing element in the ordinance, but to remind them that when they were baptized, they willingly identified themselves publicly with a suffering Savior. Christ was righteous, yet He still suffered. Their consciences were filled with fears, uncertainties and doubts. In verse 18, Peter exhorts them, in light of their baptismal commitment, to *“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to every one who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”* This reference to a good conscience explains the use of the answer of a good conscience toward God in our text in verse 21. Though men may fault them, their consciences can be at rest in knowing they are doing right in the sight of God.

They could also take hope in the fact that after Jesus had suffered, He was raised from the dead and exalted *“to the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him,”* (I Peter 3:22) and in their union with Him, they would also be exalted to rule and reign with Him in a state of freedom from sin and suffering. Thus they were to remember their public commitment they made to Christ in their baptism and be renewed in hope believing that, like Christ, they would be saved or delivered from this present evil world into the presence of their risen Lord.

Let us then, as church officials, make sure we thoroughly instruct the candidates for baptism as to its meaning in confessing Christ as their risen Lord, and to understand what Paul means in II Timothy 3:12, *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* In Philippians 1:29, *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”* Finally, II Timothy 2:11, 12, *“It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.”* (KJV)

Dear Christian, when you become discouraged with the hardships of living a Christian life, remember the commitment you made in your baptism and it will save or deliver you from your fears and doubts.