

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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BAPTISM MEANS IDENTIFICATION

The declaration made in the title of this study does not mean that identification is the only concept that is found in the word "baptism. " Those who have read the two previous issues (**SB134, SB135**) in this series of studies will know that in the history of this word **it** has been used as a designation of numerous ideas and practices. It can mean "to dip" as Luke 16:24 clearly shows. It can mean "to dye" as Rev. 19:3 indicates, and as hundreds of occurrences in Classical and Septuagint Greek will demonstrate. It can mean "to overwhelm" as Matt. 20:22,23 reveals, and, most important of all it came to mean a concept which in English can be expressed as "to identify," with the added thought of merging and relating. This concept will be further demonstrated in this study.

If a man takes a position with a large corporation he becomes identified with that company. And while such an act would also signify a relationship, it would not indicate a merger. However, if three men formed a legal partnership, they would all be identified with it, related to it and merged with it. Something like this is the concept the ancient Greeks were expressing by the word *baptizo*.

In view of these facts it becomes the task of all who study the Bible in a search for God's truth to ask each time they come upon a member of the *bapto* family of words what concept or idea is being set forth by this word as it stands in its context. The *bapto* family of words has six members: *baptif*, *baptisma*, *baptistes*, *baptizo*, *baptism os*, and *embapta*.

Many will complain that this involves too much work and insist that they lack the ability to do it. And while it is readily admitted that it does involve work, it cannot be admitted that the follower of the Lord Jesus lacks the ability. Since God has told us to "study," we should not dwell upon our abilities or inabilities. We have God's Holy Spirit as the earnest of our portion yet to be given, and it is my personal faith that this

was given to us so that we could comprehend the word that has been freely given by God.

From Job 12: 11 we learn that the ear tries words, even as the mouth tastes meat. Every day we come upon words that could mean two dozen different things and we must make a determination as to what it means in its context. Consider this example. The word *strike* means to hit. Nevertheless, an unabridged dictionary will give us about sixty different meanings or usages of this word (noun and verb). Once we determine from the context that it is a verb, we need only to consider which one of thirty-seven definitions to give it. However, I have been hearing and reading this word for many years and I do not remember ever having any difficulty in immediately arriving at the meaning intended. I always seem to know whether it means to hit, to miss (baseball), to touch the key of a musical instrument, to descend upon and blast (lightning), to arrest the attention of, to occur to mind; to cease work in order to settle a grievance, to find oil or gold, to hook a fish, to start playing (strike up the band).

We can all do this almost automatically since our mother tongue is English and we have already stored in the computers of our minds all the facts needed to make such a determination. However,- it is much more difficult when we try to do it with words that are foreign to us. The information is not stored in our minds, so we must slowly and laboriously put it there. Marvelous tools have been supplied for us, and I for one have used them and intend to keep on doing so. I have no tools for a Russian word, but I do have on my shelves tools for dealing with any Greek word. Therefore, if my understanding of baptism differs from one who has made no study of this subject, this should not be thought strange.

In Mark 16:15-20, we read the divine commission that was given by the Lord Jesus to His eleven disciples. They were told to go into all the world and herald the gospel in every creature. And to this directive was added the statement: "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.**" Here, as in almost every occurrence, the word *baptizohas* has not been translated, and this requires that the reader shall attach a meaning to this word. Since most Christians are biblically illiterate and know nothing about baptism except what they have seen performed in their churches, they will probably attach to it the concept of being dipped into or sprinkled with water. So if it does mean a water ritual, then this ceremony must be given a place of importance that is equal to believing. This I do not believe, this I cannot believe. If I did, I would be denying my God-given state of completeness in Christ (Col. 2: 10) and find my completeness in some ceremony that a man performed upon me.

Having learned from many years of study that one concept of truth that is expressed by *baptizo* is that of identification, I understand this passage to say: "**He that believeth and is identified shall be saved.**"

Following this declaration the Lord said: **"And these signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast our devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover"** (Mark 16:17,18).

These words belong to the Acts period, a time when one's personal and public identification with the Lord Jesus was a divine requirement. The nature of those times and the character of the Acts dispensation caused this need for public identification. Since God-commissioned men were speaking divinely-inspired messages, and their words were confirmed by signs following, those who heard and believed were expected to make it public. So men believed, they identified themselves with Jesus Christ, and God identified Himself with them by causing certain signs to follow those that believed.

These signs that the Lord promised would follow the believer came to an end with the great change of God's method of dealing which Paul announced by His words in Acts 28:28. Nevertheless, the imperative need for identification has not changed. It is not today essential to salvation, but it is essential to any development of the new life in Christ Jesus. The believer is hung up on a snag from which he cannot free himself as long as he fails to identify himself with Jesus Christ. These facts demand that we should have a better understanding of what identification means.

In Matt. 10:32 the Lord Himself said: **"Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven."** Of this passage R.C.H. Lenski, in an interpretive paraphrase, says: **"Whoever thus confesses and identifies Himself with Christ, with him Christ will identify Himself, him Christ will confess. "**

It is my opinion that Lenski does this because he feels that the word "confess" does not properly represent the Greek word *homologeō*. To confess usually applies to what one feels to be wrong and it is out of place when linked up with Christ. The Greek word means "to say the same thing as another," and it implies some sort of pressure that leads to so doing. Our word *avow* would be a much better rendering, since it implies an open or bold declaration, also assertion in the face of hostility. It is these implications in the Greek word that brings into it the idea of identification.

Throughout my own Christian life, I have earnestly sought to identify myself with the Lord Jesus Christ every time the opportunity has opened up to me. Without being pushy or impertinent, I have even sought to make opportunities to identify myself with Him. I would like to know how many times the question has been put to me: "What church do you belong to?" and I have answered with the avowal: "I do not

belong to any church. I am a believer in and a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my allegiance is to Him and not to any church." I would also like to know how many times I have gone through the process of the questioner trying to identify me with some denomination, and I steadfastly refusing to be identified with anything or anyone save the Lord Jesus Christ.

When it is said that one meaning of baptism is identification, this does not mean that each time it does mean this, that it is referring to identification with the Lord Jesus. A clearer understanding of this will come from meditating on I Cor. 10:2, where Paul declares that all the Israelites that came out of Egypt were "**baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.**" These men who as slaves had been identified with Pharaoh and with Egypt, are cut off from all relationship with them by the cloud and by the sea. They are now identified with Moses. He will be their sovereign, their law-giver, their judge. Thus identification can be with a man.

Another pertinent example of identification is found in 1 Peter 3:20,21. There we are told that Noah's family of "**eight souls were brought through safely by means of water.**" This translation states the Biblical facts in the case and it is true to the truth of Genesis 6, 7, and 8. The very same water that brought death to the earth's inhabitants, became a means of deliverance as the ark was supported by the waters as it rode upon them. However, the real reason for the safe keeping of seven of these was their relationship to Noah - his wife, his sons, his daughters in law. Then we are told that the representation of this, identification, does also now save us. I say we are saved by being identified with Jesus Christ. Others will say we are saved by some momentary dipping into water. **What do you say?**

In Galatians 3:26, 27 Paul declares: "**For ye are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**" It is indeed hard to believe that anyone would take this passage and twist it until it says that all who are baptized in water are baptized in Christ, yet there are many that do this. It is my conviction that the truth set forth in this passage is that as many as are identified with Christ have put on Christ. This blessed state cannot be the result of one going out and finding someone who will dip him into water.

About thirty years ago I received regularly a magazine called *Christian Life*. In it was a page called "Spiritual Clinic," and this page was edited by Dr. V. Raymond Edman, who was then President of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. In it he answered various questions and one of these concerned the baptism of infants. His answer in part declared: "Baptism is an *ordinance*, not a *doctrine* of the Christian church. Ordinances are liable to wide interpretation, which is not true of doctrine."

When I read this I began to see as never before the reason why there are so many opinions and practices in regard to baptism.

If there is no doctrine in the Bible concerning baptism, then there is nothing to guide anyone except traditions, so every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

There is much more to say, but this will have to wait for further studies.

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