

Module 4: Mandate of a Disciple

Chapter 5: Baptism in Water

So far, we have looked at the mandate of the disciple helping to set the captives free in soul, spirit and body, and also at preaching and teaching the Truth of the Lord. Just as important is that it is the mandate of the disciple to baptise someone in both water and in Spirit.

For Jesus said *Matthew 28: 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...*

It is the mandate and the duty of a disciple not only to be baptized but to also baptize others. For it says in *Acts 2:38 (New King James Version): 38 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.*

The baptism of water goes hand in hand with the baptism of the Spirit. As we will see in this study, baptism of water is our commitment to God to lead a new life, washing away the old ways, so that we can be worshippers in Spirit and in Truth. Let us understand we can be baptized in the Spirit before baptism of water, but so often when we are first baptized in water this will then prepare the way for our baptism in the Spirit.

For now, let us look at the concept of the baptism of water. Firstly we may ask is baptism necessary? Well, we see how Jesus Himself was baptized in *Matthew 3: 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan [River], to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him [vigorously protesting], saying, "It is I who need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus replied to him, "Permit it just now; for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John permitted [it and baptized] Him. 16 After Jesus was baptized, He came up immediately out of the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him (Jesus), 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased and delighted!"*

So if Jesus was baptized in water (take note which was followed by the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Him), then surely baptism is not a small issue. Let us understand Jesus allowed Himself to be baptized to show His disciples part and parcel of our spiritual walk, for it is about committing your life to the Lord and making a declaration you wish to serve Him and His Kingdom.

You see, God has made it simple for us to follow His plan of salvation. What God requires from us in order to be saved is to believe in His Son Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and commit our life to Him, which is physically but also spiritually displayed by us getting into water and being baptized (immersed) for the purpose of having Him forgive our sins and be born again in this manner.

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Baptism has caused much debate, even though Jesus Himself was baptized by the immersion of water. It was after all John the Baptist who was stunned when Jesus came to Him for baptism – and even though this was the Son of God, Jesus again put his teachings into a practical demonstration by Himself being immersed in the river. Jesus was simply showing the importance to John and the disciples of Him throughout the ages of the significance of the baptism which is the separation from the old and the new.

Many have asked is baptism necessary for salvation? In other words, will we fail to inherit eternal life if we are not baptized? We need to remember salvation comes by our faith in Jesus and our relationship with Him. Baptism will not save us. But baptism is surely the testimony we deliver in the natural and the spiritual realm to declare we are now seeking to serve the Lord as His disciple.

Now, let us read *Acts 19:4* *Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.* According to this verse, John the Baptist baptized people by mentioning just the name of Jesus Christ only. This baptism is called the baptism of repentance. This baptism was the 'Jesus only baptism' and was done away with, because the purpose of the ministry was only to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus introduced the complete baptism, which is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Baptism is not only about repentance, but about preparing to lay down one's life before the Father so that the Holy Spirit can fill a person and work within a believer. Baptism of the water needs to lead to the baptism of the Spirit; otherwise it is only the baptism of repentance.

When it comes to baptism by water, theological arguments have caused us to miss the spiritual principle of this action – it has never been something that has been bound by the physical but it speaks of our spiritual desire and hunger to draw closer to God and to draw closer to His beauty and divinity. Arguments and debates regarding the form of baptism negate the longing of the Lord for us to make a dedicated commitment unto Him in service and in our life. As we see with the spiritual betrothal of the Bride unto the Bridegroom [Jesus], there is a time where we have to push aside all that separates us from God, and we need to be “cleansed” by the washing of the Word, and we need to be separated by the spiritual act of baptism of water and of the Spirit.

It is true that according to the Word, demonstrated by Jesus Himself, baptism is the immersion into water in order for our entire being to be renewed [as it prepares the way for the Holy Spirit and a closer walk with Father and Son], just not our mind as demonstrated by the sprinkling of water. So baptism is about immersion, and it is about willingly making a decision and a self-commitment to serve the Lord. This is why you cannot baptize an infant, for an infant cannot yet make that choice. You can merely

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dedicate an infant to the Lord, but the infant when grown up needs to make a spiritual decision to be baptized by laying down his or her life for the Lord.

Let us understand the word baptism comes from the Greek word "baptizos" which means to "wash or immerse." This Greek concept is derived from the Hebrew term "t'vilah." Some might be surprised to learn that Christian baptism has its roots in Judaism. Indeed, baptism is an old Hebrew custom, and if one understands it, one will understand the significance of it and why Jesus Himself was baptized. During Jesus' time, as today in Israel, baptism was the immersion into a water bath called a mikvah. The word 'mikvah' means a pool of living water which was used for ritual purification. This procedure is called tevillah [t'vilah], which means immersion.

Before John the Baptist came preaching "repent and be baptized", immersion was thus already an accepted practice in the life of the Hebrew people. As John the Baptist stood in the Jordan River, he wasn't doing anything radical or new. T'vilah (immersion) was part of the Biblical faith before Jesus came. Immersion or baptism still remains to be seen as the "gateway" into being set apart unto the Lord spiritually.

The power of immersion was thus seen by the Hebrews as something that cleanses the spiritually unclean and brings about healing and restoration. Throughout the Old Testament, "baptism" or cleansing by water was a central part in dealing with uncleanness. For example, the leper would go through washing rituals (Leviticus 14) not for physical cleansing but spiritual cleansing. Like Naaman who immersed seven times and was healed in the Jordan River, the immersion completed the healing process for leprosy. The priests also went through immersions in preparation for temple service (Leviticus 16). The same concept of cleansing and healing from our old ways and our old nature is carried over to the New Testament.

The method of baptism during Biblical times was different than today. The person would first wash himself and make sure he was physically clean. Then he would walk into the water by himself and squat down into the fetal position. This was usually done three times and was witnessed by someone who stood nearby to make sure the immersing person was completely covered by the water. This "witness" would declare the immersion complete "in the Name" or "as a follower" of Jesus.

According to Jewish law the immersion had to have a required witness. In several New Testament references such as I Corinthians 1:13, 15; Matthew 21:25; Acts 1:22; and Acts 19:3 we see early baptism mentioned in conjunction with the name of individuals such as John and Paul. Still today, not only does God as Father, Son and Spirit bear witness to the baptism, but it is preferable that someone bears witness to declare the baptism valid in the spiritual and the natural.

Brides in ancient Israel, as well as brides in Israel today, experienced a mikvah prior to her wedding. This immersion in water is part of the Bride's

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physical and spiritual preparation for the wedding ceremony. The mikvah represents a separation from the old life to a new life.

The need for cleansing and making holy is therefore clear through the many types of washing connected with the Temple worship. For example, in Bible times, the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, was the place of God's presence. A people could only approach the Most High at these places, and only if they were ritually clean. The unclean were cut off from worship until their condition had been dealt with.

Just so, we as the Bride of Christ also have to experience our mikvah which is being baptised in water and in Spirit while also being cleansed by the Word of God.

Bride = bridegroom

Temple – Spirit can live

Our baptism of water and Spirit is indeed our separation from the old life so that we may be betrothed as a new creation unto God. *Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe, will be condemned."* How we need to be set apart unto God so that we may be found ready as the Bride for the Bridegroom!

The baptism therefore remains a question of life and death and a cleansing from this unclean world and unclean ways. It is a time when new life is given and actions reflect inward change.

The most important reason we have been called to be baptized or to be immersed is to reinforce the Bible's message of separation. As believers, we have been called out of darkness into the Light of Jesus. He called us as His own precious people. *1 Peter 2:9 (New King James Version): But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Baptism or immersion has many avenues of purpose in Judaism, yet one main goal remains, which is to be being set apart, and this is the one desire of our Lord for us to also be set apart. After all, the entire Old Testament speaks and echoes of this desire, and thus the 613 Laws of Moses was so that the nation could be set apart.

We are set apart to God as His children. He has called us to set ourselves apart in this world, and through our actions. As we choose to obey His Word and thus replicate His will, we set ourselves apart unto Him. *2 Corinthians 6:17-18 (New King James Version): 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and*

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daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” Baptism or immersion’s purpose is to spiritually cleanse the sinner from all that is contrary to the Word. Acts 2:38 (New King James Version): 38 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.

The main purpose of immersion is thus of separation. Separation is the calling of all believers. It is one reason why we were called out of darkness to walk in the light of God. Separation is central to the gospel of the Messiah. God desires His people to be set apart, or “kadosh” - be holy. As we separate ourselves from this world we actually separate ourselves unto God. We have been called to draw lines of separation between the common and the pure, the clean and the unclean, and the profane and the holy.

Immersion is thus a "procedure" that sets us apart as holy to God. Immersion is also an act of repentance, following our rebellion as the old man against God. All believers have been called to the priestly worship of God through a covenant with Him. We are to walk in cleanliness, to be free of defilement and to demonstrate daily God's standards. We become unclean when we cross the lines that God has set for living.

We need to therefore be cleansed from our old life so that we need to pass over by the Blood of Jesus into a new life. This is why Jesus died for us and rose again on the third day, so that we may draw closer to God and experience Him.

It is therefore a mandate for the disciple to be set apart by being baptized, and then baptizing others. We see this in action in Acts 8:26-40 when Phillip baptized an eunuch: 36 *As they continued along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch exclaimed, “Look! Water! What forbids me from being baptized?” 37 Philip said to him, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he replied, “I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” 38 And he ordered that the chariot be stopped; and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.*

What was the prerequisite for the baptism? Simple – the eunuch had to believe with all his heart that Jesus is the Lord. This is after all the definition of a disciple. And so Phillip fulfilled his task as a disciple by baptizing the eunuch. And yes, all disciples are called to be baptized and then to baptize others in water and also in Spirit.

Baptism is important. The author of Hebrews urged his listeners to return to God through repentance, coupled with immersion. *Hebrews 10:22 (New King James Version): let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Immersion also takes another meaning with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. *Colossians 2:11-13 (New King James Version): 11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the*

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body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 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. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Indeed, a true desire to be spiritually separated unto God as demonstrated by the water baptism speaks of our desire to be free from our old life in order to be raised anew into Jesus. It speaks of our desire to be converted from our heathen ways unto Christianity. As mentioned, this powerful conversion is understood in Judaism, while the apostles and the early believers continued the Jewish practice of mikvah (baptism) as a symbol of conversion.

Therefore, as a disciple, we need to understand the significance of the baptism, as to why we are being baptized and why we are baptizing someone else. And remember, baptism is done in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We baptize in the authority of Jesus, but to the recognition of the Trinity where all three persons of the Godhead pays witness and testimony to the rebirth. Note, there has been confusion when it comes to baptism, with some saying we must only baptise in the Name of Jesus, for He is God. However, Jesus taught the proper form of baptism is in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as designated in Matthew 28:19.

But why do we see so many instances in the New Testament where people were baptized "in Jesus' name"? It says for example in Acts 2:38, *"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" And also Acts 10:48, "And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."*

However, keep in mind 1 John 5: 6 *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*

The baptism is about spiritual recognition. All three persons of the Godhead have to agree, because even though God is ONE, there are three persons who all play an important role. To only baptize in the name of Jesus is NOT to recognise the presence and reality of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The disciples would have spoken about the baptism in the name of Jesus, for they simply wanted the Jewish people to understand that this deals with the New Covenant and not the old covenant of ritual cleansing. The disciples would have talked about the baptism in the name of Jesus to effectively indicate the gulf between physical Law and Grace. But when they baptised, it was most likely in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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Baptism is about recognition. To be baptized in the name of the Father, or unto the Father, means publicly, by a significant rite, to receive his system of religion; to bind the soul to obey his laws; to be devoted to him; to receive, as the guide and comforter of the life, his instructions, and to trust to his promises. To be baptized unto the Son, in like manner, is to receive Him as the Messiah - our Prophet, Priest, and King - to submit to his laws, and to receive him as a Saviour. To be baptized unto the Holy Spirit is to receive Him publicly as the Sanctifier, Comforter, and Guide of the soul. The meaning, then, may be thus expressed: baptizing them unto the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by a solemn profession of the only true faith, and by a solemn consecration to the service of the sacred Trinity.

The significance of baptism is therefore summed up in *2 Corinthians 5:17-21 ESV: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* By the Blood we are reconciled unto God, and by the baptism we declare we are a new creation, washed clean and willing to follow the Lord afresh.

Note: Always seek and follow the leading of the Spirit of the Lord when baptizing someone. At times we can allow a religious mind-set to stand in our way from doing the work of the Lord. Even though it is proper for baptism by immersion, at times the Lord can give the order for someone to be baptized by simply pouring water over them while they are kneeling or standing. It is about obedience.

So if you follow the Lord, you are called to be baptized and to baptize others in water. This is the walk of a disciple, for a disciple is set apart unto God, unto His kingdom and unto a life committed to the Lord's Way, Truth and Life.