FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Catechism Two, Lesson 14

Reading: Mark 1:1–11; John 1:15–34

1. Who Took The Initiative To Bring About The Baptism Of Jesus?

Jesus. He went down to the River Jordan where John was baptizing and presented himself for baptism. He did this at thirty years of age when He realized it was the time for Him to begin His public ministry. John had been baptizing only a few months before Jesus came to him. It is clear that Jesus had a deep knowledge of divine destiny regarding this moment of baptism.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him (Matt. 3:13).

John very much opposed Jesus’ being baptized by him. He recognized who He was and realized that since He was without sin, He also needed no repentance. Also John recognized that since Jesus had greater authority from God, the roles of ministry should have been reversed. But God had a reason for it all. Jesus insisted that John do it His way. John cooperated.

But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him (Matt. 3:14, 15).

2. Why Did Jesus Desire Baptism By John?

Jesus came to fulfill all His Father’s plans. This included not only fulfilling the Law of Moses but every avenue of obedience to God. Jesus said in His own words that He desired baptism in order to fulfill all righteousness. Exactly what “fulfilling all righteousness” really means has been discussed by scholars for a long time. Allow me to give you a few thoughts from some of these scholars.

A. Jesus needed to be washed and anointed for ministry.

Dr. Adam Clarke says:

There was a kind of baptism among the Jews, viz., that of the priests at their consecration (Lev. 8:6). Now, as Christ had submitted to circumcision (as a child), the initiating ordinance of the Mosaic dispensation, it was necessary He should submit to the initiating ordinance of the Christian dispensation, instituted by the same authority (the Lord God). But it was necessary on another account. Our Lord represented the High Priest, and was to be the High Priest over the house of God; now, as the High Priest was initiated into his office by washing and anointing, so must Christ be; hence, He was baptized, and anointed by the Holy Ghost. Thus He fulfilled the righteous ordinance of His initiation into the office of the High Priest, and was prepared to make an atonement for the sins of the whole of mankind.

B. Jesus needed to be made eligible to become the perfect Lamb offering.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse comments:

The Lord Jesus allowed Himself to be baptized in fulfillment of the type of the ceremonial law, as we see in the first chapter of Leviticus. The pieces of the body of the lamb were washed with pure water before they were placed on the altar to be consumed as the burnt offering.

And when John identified the Lord Jesus as being spotless without, the voice came from Heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matt. 3:17). Thus did God pronounce His Son to be spotless within. By permitting Himself to be baptized, the Lord Jesus announced to earth and heaven that He was the spotless Son of God, and eligible to die.

C. Jesus had to become identified with His people in all things.

Frederick L. Godet makes this observation:

The term Lamb of God is so original that, if it is historical, it must have its ground in some particular impression which the Baptist had received at the time of his previous meeting with Jesus. And indeed, we must remember that when an Israelite came to have himself baptized by John, he began by making confession of his sins (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5). Jesus could not have dispensed with this preparatory act without arrogating to himself from the first an exceptional position, and nothing was farther from his thought than this: He wished to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). What, then, could His confession be? Undoubtedly a collective confession, analogous to that of Daniel (Dan. 9), or that of Nehemiah (Neh. 1), a representation of the sin of Israel and of the world, as it could be traced by the pure being, who was in communion with the perfectly holy God, and at the same time the tenderly loving being, who, instead of judging His brethren, consecrated Himself to the work of saving them.

3. Which Of These Above Statements Is Nearest To The Truth?

I believe all of these statements to be true and helpful. Together they comprise what is, perhaps, the real truth of the matter. Notice these truths as we break them down separately to examine them in detail.

(1) Christ fulfilled the initiatory ordinances of both Covenants.

Christ was circumcised on the eighth day, as was required of all male children under the law and under the Abrahamic Covenant. Then as an adult ready to assume public leadership, He brought into being the initiatory ordinance of the New Covenant, inner circumcision through water baptism. Christ Himself in this way, becomes the bridge from the Old Covenant to the New. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness under the Old Covenant and gave His own body and blood to institute the New Covenant.

I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6).

(2) Christ needed both washing and anointing, and in that order.

God first cleanses what He is going to fill with His presence. Each Old Testament priest had to be washed and anointed before he could serve. This type had to be fulfilled in Christ by His baptism and infilling with the Holy Spirit. The same holds true for us.

… be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord (Isa. 52:11).

(3) Jesus had to be prepared, scrutinized, and accepted as the perfect Lamb.

Lambs used for sacrifice had to be without blemish or fault. They were kept in the house and carefully inspected for defects before they were presented to the priest as a vicarious sacrifice. If the sacrifice was rejected, the sinner would remain in his sins. The sacrifice had to be acceptable. This is precisely what had to be done regarding the final sacrifice, the Lamb that would take away all sin!

(4) Christ voluntarily identified Himself with the people He came to save.

Christ was made of woman, under the law for a reason. He became flesh and blood in order to become a true partaker of all that human life is. He further became a Jew, subject to all the law’s penalty for sin. At His baptism, Jesus publicly accepted His place as one of the human beings He came to redeem. Through this identification with man, He became able to take our place and die in our stead.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14).

4. How Did God Demonstrate His Acceptance Of The Baptism Of Jesus?

Whenever a sacrifice of animals was accepted in the Old Testament, God made this known by consuming that sacrifice with fire. The smoke ascended to Him as a sweet-smelling savour. This has been true from the very beginning of man’s worship to God. Cain recognized that Abel’s sacrifice had been accepted while his had been rejected (Gen. 4:5). God Himself is that consuming fire. The Father demonstrated His acceptance of Jesus’ offering of Himself both as a living sacrifice at the onset of His earthly ministry and as the sacrificial Lamb through death. The Holy Spirit remained upon Him as the abiding fire of acceptance.

A. The Holy Spirit remained upon Him.

God had given John the Baptist a special sign by which he would recognize Messiah. He would see the Holy Spirit as a dove descended out of the heavens, light upon a man, and remain there (John 1:33). Until this time, the Holy Spirit had only come upon men sporadically to anoint them for special tasks. He never had become a permanent resident in a human life before the baptism of Jesus. Here again, Jesus was initiating the New Covenant. Even though Jesus was his cousin, John needed this sign from God to be able to identify Him.

And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God (John 1:31–34).

B. His voice spoke a clear commendation.

The Spirit and the Word always agree. Here we have a historical illustration of this truth. The dove lit and remained. The Father then gave His personal word of verification. He not only gave validity to Jesus’ later claim to be the Son of God, but openly manifested His acceptance and pleasure in His obedience. We have one other instance in which God spoke much the same thing regarding Jesus: at His

transfiguration. At His baptism, Jesus presented Himself to be the offering for sin, the Lamb. At His transfiguration, He was accepted by the Father after being thoroughly scrutinized and found sinless and pure.

And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased (Luke 3:22).

C. The dove spoke of new beginnings after God’s judgment of the old.

After the earth was void, it was re-created by the Spirit’s “brooding” (Gen. 1:2). After the Flood, Noah released a dove. When the dove found rest, it indicated to Noah that it was time to open the ark and begin life anew. God had judged and removed the evil. Similarly, after the Old Covenant had done its work, it was set aside. A New and better Covenant had been created and was soon to be ratified in the person of Christ.

5. Was The Witness Of The Water And The Spirit Necessary For Jesus?

Most decidedly! Jesus came by water, Spirit, and blood to provide our eternal salvation. We can now watch the accounts of His life to see what the Lord God will do through a man who is filled with the Spirit “without measure.”

Always remember that the Lord confirms His Word by the mouth of two or three witnesses. First, He had said to Mary that Jesus would be “the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32). Secondly, John would recognize the Son of God by the sign of the dove. Thirdly, the Father wanted to make it even more personal—He added His own voice of approval.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son (1 John 5:8, 9).

Home Study: Lesson 14

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Give four reasons why Jesus needed to be baptized by John. Keep it simple.

2. How did God show His approval of Jesus’ decision to be baptized by John?

3. What Scripture passage tells us that Jesus Christ Himself is the covenant? Write both the reference and the Scripture.

4. In what three ways does God bear witness of His Son on earth?

a.

b.

c.

5. What was different about the way the Holy Spirit came to Jesus?