NEW COVENANT INITIATION

Catechism Two, Lesson 15

Reading: Acts 2:32–41; 8:36–39

1. In What Way Is Water Baptism Related To The Preaching Of The Kingdom Of God?

John the Baptist had closely interrelated repentance, water baptism, and the kingdom being at hand—an event about to happen. Jesus continued this message. When Jesus commissioned His disciples to continue His work after His departure, He included the ministry of water baptism as an integral part of their ministry. The Bible gives us several reasons for the command requiring obedience to the gospel in terms of water baptism.

A. Water baptism is essential to the new birth.

Regeneration or the new birth is not something we can do for ourselves. It must be done for us by the Lord. This spiritual awakening results in our entering into a whole new dimension of life: the kingdom of God. Jesus first explained the necessity of such a thorough supernatural change to the Jewish teacher, Nicodemus.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.… Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).

B. Water baptism is an expression of genuine repentance.

In the preachings of John, Jesus, and the disciples, water baptism was taught as directly related to repentance. As soon as people were convicted of their sin and realized their need of God’s saving work, they were told both how to believe and how to obey the gospel. The fruit of their change of mind and heart would be seen in their submission to water baptism.

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19).

C. Water baptism is an expression of true faith.

When we truly believe something and are deeply persuaded it is true, we give ourselves wholly to it. Water baptism was an important step of commitment required of all who would enter the kingdom of God. Through water baptism, the believer renounced his former allegiance to the world and its system, and declared himself subject to the Lordship of Christ.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15, 16).

D. Water baptism marks us as a part of God’s people.

The kingdom of God involves more than obedience to a new king. It also includes membership in a whole new spiritual nation, God’s kingdom of kings and priests. God’s Old Covenant nation was marked as His possession through a covenant of blood and of circumcision. The blood of animals was shed for the covering of sin. The foreskin of each male was circumcised on the eighth day as a token of membership in God’s covenant nation. Spiritual Israel—God’s New Covenant people—also has an initiatory rite: the circumcision of heart received in water baptism. No one was made a part of the local church in the New Testament until he had submitted to water baptism.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God … (1 Pet. 2:9, 10).

2. Was The Usual Mode Of Water Baptism Immersion?

The Greek word for baptism itself means “immersion.” In the early Church no other means of administering water was spoken of as baptism. In W. E. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, we are told:

Baptisma: baptism, consisting of the process of immersion, submersion and emergence (from Bapto, to dip), is used of (a) John’s baptism; (b) of Christian baptism; and (c) of the overwhelming judgments to which the Lord voluntarily submitted on the cross, e.g., Luke 12:50.

Baptizo (verb): to baptize, primarily a frequentative form of Bapto, to dip, was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc. Plutarchus uses it to describe the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl. Plato used the term metaphorically when he said he was overwhelmed with questions.

3. Did The Disciples Take Jesus Seriously Regarding Baptism?

Indeed they did. As you carefully study the book of Acts, you will find that no one was considered a Christian without water baptism. Many of today’s churches have declared “open membership”—that is membership without the benefit of water baptism. But this was not acceptable New Testament practice. Water baptism was always treated as a necessity in this package we could label “Christian initiation”: repentance, faith, water baptism, Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

A. Water baptism was a command—it was not obligatory.

Peter answered the convicted and questioning multitude, “Yes, there was something they could do to reverse their relationship to the King they had crucified; they could repent and submit to His baptism.”

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

B. Even when the Holy Spirit sovereignly baptized people, the disciples required baptism in water as well.

At the house of Cornelius, Italian soldiers heard the gospel. The usual order of initiation was reversed. The Holy Spirit came upon them while they were receiving the Word. Peter insisted that since God was showing His acceptance of these Gentiles into the New Covenant, their initiation must be completed with water baptism.

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord … (Acts 10:47, 48).

God had a definite reason for reversing the order of baptisms here. The Jewish prejudice against Gentiles was so strong that had He not demonstrated His acceptance of them into the New Covenant, they would have been denied the privilege of water baptism. God opened the door and no man could close it. Later on Peter defended his action to the Jerusalem church by saying, “Who was I that I could withstand God?”

C. When the apostles recognized something deficient in Christian experience, they examined this foundation stone of water baptism.

Paul taught a dozen disciples of John in the city of Ephesus. He noticed something peculiar about them—something was missing. He asked whether they had received the Holy Spirit Baptism. They knew nothing of such a baptism. This was so extraordinary in the early Church that Paul immediately suspected something was inadequate about their water baptism. He inquired further. They had only received John’s baptism; they knew nothing of baptism into Christ. Paul required them to be baptized in water and immediately they were receptive to the Holy Spirit as well.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied (Acts 19:5, 6).

4. Is Water Baptism To Be Done Publicly Before The Church Or Privately With A Person’s Family?

Through repentance, faith, and water baptism, we are made a part of the redeemed community—the Church. When we are baptized as a part of community worship, it strengthens our ties of fellowship and our sense of belonging not only to God but to His people.

We believe that the Scriptures tell us and show by example that water baptism is to be practiced publicly. The reason for this is that we are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ through deed as well as word.

(1) The ordinance of the Lord’s Supper declares especially the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, in instituting this ordinance, said, ‘ ‘For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do declare the Lord’s death till He comes (italics mine). The Lord’s Supper is a memorial of His death on the Cross of Calvary.

(2) In water baptism we are commemorating the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He not only died, but was buried and rose again for our justification. As we are identified with Him in death, burial, and resurrection, we too can live in newness of life. Baptism is the memorial of Christ’s triumph over sin and death in resurrection.

Together, the Lord’s Supper and water baptism declare the full and glorious gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and our identification with Him in it.

5. Is Water Baptism Simply An Emblem Or Does This Initiation Do A Work Within Us?

Only in the Old Testament do we find actions required which only picture something else. Even there, when these actions were done in faith, God dealt with the people in redemptive mercy. In the New Covenant rites become reality in Christ through the Holy Spirit who applies that reality to us. All of the obediences included as initiation into the New Covenant do work a distinct change within us. Repentance is the change of mind and heart toward God about sin and ourselves. Faith is the transfer of reliance from dead works to the living God. Water baptism is the inner cutting away and burial of the old life of sin. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the importation of God’s own abiding presence, the basis of all our living in Christ.

A. Baptism is a burial.

Through repentance and faith we have agreed with God that we are dead in trespasses and sins. In baptism, we consent to His burial of all we have been. The “carnal nature” or “old man of sin” is cut from us and left behind at baptism.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3, 4).

B. Baptism is a resurrection.

Baptism should provide a clean break with sin. We are then free to be raised as brand new people by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are quickened by a whole new life principle: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

For if to have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him (Rom. 6:5–9).

C. Baptism is a stripping away of the carnal nature.

The carnal nature is at odds with God and always resists Him. This basic inner hostility is the result of Adam’s sin. We call it “original sin” or “enmity against God.” Until this is removed through water baptism, we cannot love and serve God from the heart.

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11, 12).

Home Study: Lesson 15

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

1. Write down the two Greek words for baptism and their meanings.

a.

b.

2. Why does one need water baptism when he has already repented of sin and believed upon Christ?

3. Is water baptism optional? Give reasons for your answer.

4. In what way do the Lord’s Supper and baptism preach the gospel?

5. What is baptism in experiential terms?

a. Baptism is a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

b. Baptism is a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

c. Baptism is a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of the\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_.