

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BAPTISM

1. SALVATION THROUGH BAPTISM:

The Lord said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). The Lord did not say He that believeth shall be saved, but considered Baptism as a condition, beside faith.

2. NEW BIRTH THROUGH BAPTISM:

Through Baptism we are granted the new birth of water and of the Spirit, according to the saying of the Lord to Nicodemus "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God". (Jn 3:3). The Lord clarified this further by saying "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5)...."that which is born of the Spirit is spirit....so is every one that is born of the Spirit". In this manner, whoever is born of water and of the Spirit is born from on high, of the Spirit. This is the second birth.

There is no other explanation for the word "born of water" except in Baptism where the Baptized comes out of the Baptismal font like a new born comes out of the womb. The words of Saint Paul echo the same meaning "according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). And again referring to the Church "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word". In this respect the Apostle considers the washing of water (through Baptism) the same as the washing of re-generation (the new birth).

3. WASHING AWAY OF SINS THROUGH BAPTISM:

Baptism is a washing away of sins, according to the last two verses, and also according to Ananias the Damascene who addressed Saul of Tarsus after the latter received the call from the Lord "Brother Saul....why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16).

Right here we can see clearly that the washing away of sins is one of the results of Baptism. This example of Saul of Tarsus is really amazing. The Lord Christ Himself has called him to be an Apostle unto the Gentiles, and a chosen vessel to bear His Name, and to suffer for His Name's sake (Acts 9:15,16). In spite of this, he did not receive the forgiveness of his sins even after meeting the Lord, even though he believed, and became an Apostle, he still needed Baptism in order to wash away his sins.

It is possible that Saint Paul continuously meditated on this washing away of sins through Baptism, for he later tells the Corinthians "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (1Cor 6:11). Through Baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ, they too were granted the forgiveness of their sins. The same doctrine is upheld by Saint Peter when he addressed the Jews (Acts 2:38):

when the jews believed on the day of Pentecost, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles: "Men, and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:38).

Now if the faith of the Jews were sufficient for the forgiveness of their sins on that day, then why did the great Apostle ask them to be baptized for the remission of sins. This has a great significance since it happened on that historical day of the foundation of the church, a day when the the doctrines concerning Salvation were laid.

4. BAPTISM AS DYING WITH CHRIST AND RISING WITH HIM::

The Bible tells us "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Further, the road to Salvation began by death, for Christ died on our behalf. Hence we had to die with Christ, or at least be made conformable to His death, according to the saying of the Apostle "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death" (Phi.3:10). We fulfill this through Baptism. But how?

The Apostle says "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom 6:3,4). He further confirms the same doctrine by saying "we are buried with him by Baptism into death...we have been planted together in the likeness of his death...our old man is crucified with him..." (Rom 6:5,6).

The Apostle also says to the Colossians "Buried with him in Baptism" (Col. 2:12), still confirming this important doctrine.

And what is the reason for this? the same Apostle says "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Rom 6:8).

Baptism is essential for salvation, for through it we become partakers of the death of Christ. It is belief in death as a means of life, and recognition that the wages of sin is death.

In this same Chapter (Rom 6) two important observations become apparent:

1-The doctrine of being buried with Christ implies the necessity of immersion, in order to emulate the laying of the person inside the tomb.

2-That one of the results of baptism is crucifixion of our old man.

5. RENEWAL THROUGH BAPTISM:

The Apostle says "we are buried with him by Baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised

up from the dead...even so we should walk in the newness of life. (Rom 6:4), in other words we should walk in the new life that we obtain through Baptism. In fact our nature is renewed through Baptism. But how?

6. THROUGH BAPTISM WE PUT ON CHRIST:

According to the Apostle "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). The effectiveness of Baptism could not have been shown in any stronger terms.

To put on Christ, to put on His righteousness as a gift that He grants through Baptism. To put on salvation that He grants in Baptism through His Blood...To put on the Divine image (Gen 1:26), the image we lost through the Parental sin.

No one will doubt that Baptism was pre-figured by circumcision in the Old Testament. Hence the Apostle declares concerning the Lord Jesus "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)

It is well known that in circumcision a part of the flesh is cut off and it dies thus symbolizing total death in Baptism. And in as much as circumcision is a permanent mark that is indelible, the same is true of Baptism.

And while in circumcision blood is shed, likewise the new life obtained through Baptism, is through the worthiness of the Blood that was shed on our behalf.

And if through circumcision the circumcised was granted membership in the congregation of the faithful; God's own people (Gen 17:7), likewise also the baptized becomes a member of the Church; God's own people; a member of the Body of Christ.

And in as much as the uncircumcised was cut off from his people (Gen 17:14), likewise every one who is not born of water and of the Spirit (Jn 3:3,5), cannot enter into the Kingdom of God, for he did not enter into the Baptismal font neither was he buried with Christ, nor risen with Him.

Circumcision was necessary, even obligatory according to the Divine commandment. So is Baptism, a necessity for the forgiveness of sins and the membership in the body of Christ.

A man dies once and is later risen, he can be circumcised only once. In the same manner there is but one Baptism that cannot be repeated, for the baptized can die with Christ only once.

The Apostle elaborates on the analogy of circumcision and Baptism, and the relationship of each to forgiveness of sins in his letter to the Colossians, where he speaks about the spiritual circumcision, the circumcision of Christ, the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. It is obvious that the Apostle speaks about Baptism for he continues

"buried with him in Baptism wherein also ye are risen with him...and you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:11-13).

The Old Testament figures of Baptism testify to the same doctrine:

1-The ark of Noah: St. Peter tells us concerning this "...while the ark was a preparing wherein few, that is eight souls were saved by water. the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us" (1Pet 3:20,21).

Here we have a clear indication that salvation can be obtained through Baptism by water. Those who were saved from destruction by the flood were a type of the baptized, and the ark was a figure of Baptism.

2-Circumcision was also a figure of Baptism, and we have dealt with that already.

3-The crossing of the Red sea is another figure of baptism, concerning which Saint Paul declares "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1Cor 10:1,2).

It is agreed upon that the crossing of the Red Sea represented salvation of the people of God from the bondage of Pharaoh. It is also a figure of the salvation we obtain, through Baptism, from the bondage of sin and death. Once again water figures prominently in this analogy. And the role of Moses in the parting of the sea typifies the role of the Priesthood in the New Testament Baptism. The same can be said of Noah's role who was a type of the Priesthood in the Patriarchal age.

4-Ezekiel also prophesied concerning Baptism (Ezek 16:8,9), where the Lord addresses sinful Jerusalem (a type of the fallen human soul) "I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil". This **washing with water** is obviously a reference to Baptism, and the **anointing with oil** a reference to the anointing of the Holy Spirit (the Sacrament of Chrismation). Moreover the expression "thou becamest mine" refers to joining the body of Christ (membership in the church).

We can summarize now saying that salvation and forgiveness of sins are obtained through Baptism, not only according to the New Testament doctrines, but also according to the Old Testament figures of Baptism that we alluded to.

The doctrine of forgiveness of sins through Baptism is well entrenched in the Creed we profess "we believe in one Baptism for the remission of sins".

BAPTISM AS A PRIESTLY FUNCTION

Baptism can only be performed by a Canonically ordained priest. The Bible clearly shows that Christ did not leave this responsibility to laymen but only to His Holy Disciples. This is evident in the Lord's commandment to His Disciples before His Ascension "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mat 28:19). This is also confirmed in (Mark 16:15,16).

It is also evident according to the Book of Acts, that only the Apostles baptized in the beginning of the preaching in the early church. Later on this was passed on to their disciples the Bishops, and through those to the priests.

This is the reason we do not recognize any Baptism performed by other than a Canonically ordained priest, that is a priest ordained by the laying-on of hands by someone who has the authority to ordain. Such a priest must have the Priestly authority to perform the Sacraments, in other words he ought not be deposed or excommunicated.

BAPTISM AS A SACRAMENT

Since the dawn of Christianity, Baptism was established as an essential Sacrament that followed immediately one's entrance into the faith. No one could do without it.

According to the actual practices of the early church, we have the example of the entrance of the Jews into the faith on the day of the Pentecost; When Saint Peter exhorts them to be baptized immediately: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). On that day three thousand people were baptized. No one could doubt that this was difficult, tiresome and very time consuming. Had it not been so essential, our fathers the Apostles would have not performed so many Baptisms on that day.

If faith alone sufficed, what was the need to baptize all those thousands? The Apostle could have simply said "brethren as long as you believe, you may go in peace, for you have been saved, and there is no need for any thing else".

The same pattern is also seen in the Baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch who said to Philip "see, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?". Here again we are told that Philip baptized the eunuch immediately after he entered into the faith...and he went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:36).

And Saul of Tarsus, when he was called by the Lord and was converted, was baptized in order to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). And the prison keeper of Philippi, when he believed, "was baptized, he and all his. straightway". (Acts 16:33). So also did Lydia the seller of purple who was baptized and all her household when she entered the faith. (Acts 16:15).

And Cornelius the centurion was also baptized by Saint Peter together with all who heard the word, even after they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:44,47). If salvation was through faith alone, why were all those who believed

baptized?

BAPTISM BY IMMERSION

The study of the Bible clearly indicates that Baptism was practiced by immersion and not by sprinkling. Even the Baptism of John was by immersion. Jesus Christ was baptized by immersion, according to the Biblical account "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water" (Mat 3:16),(Mark 1:10). It is significant that our church calls the Feast of Epiphany "the Feast of Immersion" (Eid Al Ghotas), in order to preserve this early tradition for us.

The same situation is also noticed in the account of the Baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, where we read "and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip". (Acts 8:38,39). Here we have a clear evidence of immersion, for if sprinkling were permitted, then Philip would have baptized the eunuch even in the chariot, with-out the need for either of them to go down into the water.

The Greek word "Baptisma" means "to dye", and it is obvious that this can only be done by immersion.

Since Baptism is dying with Christ, and burial with Him, hence St. Paul's saying "we are buried with him by baptism into death" (Rom 6:4), and also "buried with him in baptism" (Col 2:12). Obviously to be buried with Him by Baptism can only be achieved by immersion, where coming out of the Baptismal font represents rising up with Christ after dying with Him, and being buried with Him. Sprinkling cannot represent this process of dying then being risen.

Baptism is the new birth. And while in natural birth the new born comes out of the womb, in Baptism the new born of water and of the Spirit comes out of the Baptismal font. Sprinkling does not represent this process of the new birth.

Baptism is washing away of sins, as Saint Paul was told by Ananias (Acts 22:16), and as he himself tells his disciple Titus; "He saved us by the washing of regeneration" (Ti 3:5). This washing requires immersion and not sprinkling.

All ancient church buildings have a Baptismal font, a historical testimony to Baptism by immersion, since sprinkling does not require a font.

INFANT BAPTISM

We baptize our children for the following reasons:

1-We care for their eternity, for the Lord clearly declares "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). The Lord never exempted children from this ruling, so how can we risk losing our children's eternal life by

with-holding Baptism from them?

2-Through Baptism, a child is given an opportunity to grow up in life as a part of the church, to enjoy her Divine Sacraments, to experience the work of Grace, and it's effectiveness in his or her life. In doing this, we are really preparing them for a life in faith, while if we delay their Baptism we actually deprive them of all the means of Grace and faith.

3-Concerning the saying of the Lord "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved", this is meant for those who are in an age that would allow them to do so.

That is why our church would not allow an adult to be baptized without first believing in order to fulfill this commandment of the Lord. As for children, we baptize them according to another commandment of the Lord "Suffer little children and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 19:14).

4-Concerning faith, children have nothing to hinder them from believing. for they have not yet entered into the stage of doubts, the stage of searching and probing that characterizes adulthood. As a matter of fact children are endowed with a nature that believes and accepts every thing. They have not yet acquired the ability (or rather the disability) that leads them to refuse, and resist faith. In short they lack all the negative influences that prevent them from receiving the kingdom of God.

5-In the same line of reasoning, if we were to carry this pre-requisite of faith prior to Baptism a step further, then we would have to exclude from Baptism those adults who are not mature enough or sophisticated enough to grasp all the doctrines that constitute our faith. That would probably disqualify illiterate or simple minded people, and certainly the mentally retarded from the ranks of the faithful.?!

Some will object; what if the child grows up and then refuses the faith? The answer is; he would be like any one else who denounces the faith... he would be exercising his free will to refuse to submit to the grace he obtained through Baptism. As for us we would be blameless since we did what we ought to do concerning him (or her). Such a person would not be any different from those who having begun in the Spirit, are made perfect in the flesh (Gal 3:3). Chances are, however, that such a child who received the graces of Baptism as a youngster, who grew up in life as a member of the church, and experienced the means of grace that were made available to him, such a person is less likely to go astray or commit apostasy, than the person whose Baptism was delayed until he is an adult.

Several Biblical accounts imply that infant Baptism was practiced in the early church. for example, in the account of the prison keeper from Philippi, Saints Paul and Silas say to him "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). What is implied here is the fact that his faith shall be the first step that will lead his household into salvation. That is the reason that later on we are told "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house...and was baptized, he and all his straightway" (Acts 16: 32-34). Children were not excluded obviously since he was baptized "and all his" and that includes children obviously.

We find the same situation in the account of the conversion of Lydia the seller of purple where we are told that "she was baptized, and her house-hold" (Acts 16:15).

Saint Paul also mentions that he "baptized the house-hold of Stephnas" (1Cor 1:16). Were all these "house-holds" childless?

And those three thousands that were baptized on the day of Pentecost, there is no evidence in the Biblical account that they did not include children.

9-There is historical evidence that infant Baptism was practiced in the early church. For example a controversy arose between Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome concerning the origin of the human soul and whether it is born or created. Saint Augustine taught that it is born with the body, while Saint Jerome taught that it was created. To prove his point Saint Augustine wrote; "If it were created then it does not inherit the Parental sin, why then do we baptize children? Saint Jerome could not answer this question.

The Bible does not contain one single verse that contradicts infant Baptism.

We baptize children according to the faith of their parents, and this practice has many analogies in the Bible:

For example, circumcision, which is a figure of Baptism as we said earlier, and through which the circumcised joined the congregation of God, according to the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen 17:11) was done on the eighth day (Gen 17:12). A new born who is eight days old would not know any thing about the covenant between God and Abraham, nor would he know any thing about his membership in the congregation of God, and yet he was circumcised according to his parent's faith in that covenant. And this lack of knowledge did not hinder him from the membership in God's congregation, neither did it deprive him from the promises that God gave to Abraham. He received all of these on account of the faith of his parents.

The crossing of the Red Sea was another figure of Baptism. Saint Paul even calls it a "Baptism" (1Cor 10:2). It represented salvation from the bondage of Pharaoh, which is an Old Testament symbol of the future salvation from the bondage of sin, and Satan, and death. Many of the people who crossed the Red Sea were certainly old enough to realize the meaning of their salvation effected by the mighty hand of the Lord. But what about the babes carried on their mothers' shoulders. They knew nothing about the matter and still they obtained salvation from the bondage on account of the faith of their parents. They were indeed "baptized unto Moses in the sea" before having any faith.

Another important example is the deliverance of the children from the plague through the blood of the Pass over lamb, according to the saying of the Lord unto Moses concerning the killing of the Lamb and the striking of the door post and the side posts with it's blood "and when I see the blood I will pass over you" (Ex 12:13). This blood of the lamb was a type of the blood of the Lord Christ, through which we obtained salvation, as Saint Paul explains

"Christ our pass over was sacrificed for us". (1Cor 5:7). The question arises; Those children that were delivered through the Pass over lamb, had they any faith? how much did they know about the covenant between God and Moses concerning the Pass over lamb and about salvation through it's blood? The answer for both questions is negative. Nevertheless they obtained salvation on account of the faith of their parents. Those parents who had faith in the blood, and its effectiveness, and its importance for deliverance from the plague.

All those children who obtained salvation through circumcision, through the crossing of the Red Sea, through the blood of the Pass over lamb, all of them understood the meanings of those actions later on, when they grew up. And yet they received that salvation as a free gift, on account of the faith of their parents. They obtained salvation as children according to God's covenants with their parents, and when they grew up they lived the faith of their parents.