**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***Baptisms?***

 **Focus on Colossians 2:12**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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**Colossians 2:12**

 having been **buried** with Him in **baptism**,

in which you were also **raised** up with Him

**through faith in** the **working of God,**

 who **raised** Him **from** the **dead**.

Notice, Paul is writing to the Believers in terms of what has already happened to the congregation in Colossae. . . “having been”, “in which you were also raised”. Paul is reminding them or perhaps he is explaining to them in words they can understand what has happened to them. We have all experienced events in our life and afterwards had a hard time explaining the event. Paul is giving them a detailed account of the spiritual reality they experienced. In addition, Paul knows that his letters will most likely be passed to others and quoted in order to witness the Gospel Message.

 Paul joins a number of the key elements of the Gospel Message together in verse 12 (burial, baptism, resurrection from the dead, faith, work of God).

**Baptism Defined**

 The Greek word for baptism is “baptisma”, literally meaning to “dip under/immerse”. This alone is insufficient to provide a New Testament contextual definition. Taking a bath or a swim is not an unusable act. Therefore, an immersion during a ceremonial purification/washing/lustration/cleansing is all symbolic of Jesus Christ being immersed in death on the Cross but raised from death to walk. . . leaving an empty tomb that was well-guarded by Roman soldiers. However, this is the work of God in the flesh as Jesus the Christ. What does it have to do with others? In other words, how can a person be joined to and benefit from the work of Jesus Christ? This is the main question Paul is providing an answer. And that answer is a spiritual answer. . . “through faith”.

**Faith and Belief Defined**

To clear up the use of the words “faith” and “believe”, they are translated from the Greek πιστεύω/pisteuo for “believe” and πίστις/pistis for “faith”. Both words are similar in spelling and amplify trust and commitment. They can almost be used interchangeable. Here are examples of Paul using both words in the same sentences.

**Galatians 3:22** But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

What is the “promise” that is accessed by trusting and committing? Salvation.

How is the promise obtained? By trusting and committing to Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 11:6** And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

 First, a person must trust and commit that God exists.

Second, to please God, a person must trust and commit to Him.

**Faith/Belief and Baptism**

We need to be biblically clear to everyone to whom we witness. . . that grace, faith and salvation does not originate in the heart and mind of fallen depraved humanity (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10); it is a grace gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

**The faith that saves . . .** is an experience of spirit that is a one-time event. At some point, there is a one-time sealing of a person who trusts and commits to God. Within *trusting* and *committing* requires a person to humbly surrender themselves to God. A person senses they have a need for peace with their Creator and neighbor by seeing the relevant magnitude of humanity’s corruption in operation all around them. However, they cannot accomplish these relationships of peace unless they have assistance. This is where God enters. A person listens to the message of truth that will bring the peace. Then they have a decision to make. This is the one-time event. A person may contemplate for years, but there will come a time when they accept God’s Spirit in their heart. At that point, they become regenerated and justified to God. Then the process of maturing (sanctification) takes place for the rest of their lives.

**Ephesians 1:13** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, [trusted and committed] **you were sealed in Him** with the Holy Spirit of promise.

It is by God’s grace that we have access to faith that saves us . . . being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus **(Romans 3:24).**

**Faith that Sanctifies**

Once a person is regenerated, then there is the faith of God that grows in application through their lives that produces good works. We mature in a process called *sanctification*, for it is God’s will at work in us for His good pleasure **(Philippians 2:12-13).**

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear [awe] and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

These two verses must be quoted together and in context of God’s love. For God is love and He loved us first. God’s desire is for us to be perfected in His love. Love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in God’s love (1 John 4:16-19).

So, with this Scripture in 1 John 4, we see that Believers are to have an “awe-reverent” respect for God’s Holy Spirit at work in them to mature them in His image. Yes, and it is God at work in the Believers that matures (sanctifies) them. . . not works derived from the Believer. God has plans for us in which to walk (Ephesians 2:8-10). Believers do the work of God not their work.

**Baptisms – Which One Saves?**

In all of Paul’s letters, he constantly defines and clarifies the Gospel Message. As we read through his letter to the local body of Believers in Colossae, we arrive at verse 2:12. We read verse 12 with the preceding context. . . that Christ is the head of the church and the fullness of Deity in which Believers are made complete. Believers are not made complete by doing works of manmade religious institutions. This completion is made possible because “in” Christ Believers have been circumcised without hands. What? That sounds impossible! Yes, it is a God act. Therefore, salvation is an “act of God”. . . that one-time event.

 Paul’s words in Colossians 2:12 direct our attention to baptism. To be accurate, New Testament Scripture presents three baptisms: **John the Baptist by water, Water-Baptism by disciples, and Holy Spirit/fire Baptism by Jesus**. So, what is Paul saying. Which baptism saves?

 First, it needs to be noted that water-baptism was not exclusive to the Jews. Many cultures practiced water-baptism signifying a new direction or oneness with a spirit. Water-baptism was often performed in running waters signifying that a spirit was present. Also, water-baptism was used in a purification act to cleanse someone before entering a sacred place. Therefore, water-baptism was well understood by the surrounding cultures of the Holy Land to signify a change in life or purification. It was a universal way to declare something personal had happened.

**Baptism in water performed by John the Baptist**

Who was this guy? Why does it make a difference what he said?

To the Jews, he is considered to be a prophet from God in the line of the Old Testament prophets through whom God spoke. History reveals that he is the last in the line of the Old Testament prophets. John the Baptist is the one who was the transitioning prophet living aside Jesus, the immediate forerunner of Christ. The pregnancies of Mary (mother of Jesus) and Elizabeth (mother of John) are parallel events chronicled in the Gospel of Luke chapter 1. The main role of John the Baptist was to point to Jesus as the embodiment of God, “The” Messiah. Isaiah 40:3-5 declares that there will be. . .

 3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 "Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

 . . .then the last book of the Old Testament declares. . .

**Malachi 3:1** "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

 In the New Testament, the Old Testament prophecies come true and are recorded as follows. . .

**John 1:26** John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know.

**Acts 13:24** after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

**Acts 19:4** Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

**Mark 1:4** John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

 John’s baptism signified a person turning (repenting) their attention to Jesus as the Messiah who could forgive their sins. John did not have authority to forgive sin. Remember, repentance means to turn.

**Baptism in Water Performed by the Disciples** – for witnessing what has already happened – salvation (Acts 2:38).

In Matthew 28:19, the Resurrected Jesus commissioned the Disciples, and by extension the Church, to first make disciples and then baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The biblical context here is a reference to water-baptism. Notice that disciples are water-baptized. Baptism by water does not make disciples. Then, how are disciples made?

 In John 3:22-36, Scripture records an overlap in the water-baptism ministries of Jesus and His disciples and John the Baptist where both were water-baptizing people at the same time but at two different locations. Scripture makes it clear that Jesus personally did not water-baptize anyone. . . that His disciples did (John 4:2). Jesus’ disciples were water-baptizing those who had surrendered to God in order for them to make a public statement of faith like those later did at Cornelio’s’ house.

In the account in John 3, John the Baptist responds to a question about Jesus’ disciple’s ministry by saying. . . “a man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven” (John 3:27). And he denounced that he was the Christ but that he had been sent ahead of Him who is the bridegroom. And now that more people were turning to Jesus, his ministry must decrease. And that Jesus is the one who gives the Spirit (John 3:33). And a person that believes in Jesus has eternal life. John the Baptist is not the bridegroom-giving-Spirit through whom people gain eternal life. This leads us to the third baptism presented in the New Testament.

**Baptism by Holy Spirit – Salvation**

**Did John the Baptist Talk About Spirit-Baptism?**

**Matthew 3:11** "As for me, [John the Baptist] I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**John 1:33** [John the Baptist said] . . . "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 1:5** [Resurrected Jesus speaking] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

**Mark 1:8** [John the Baptist said] "I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**Acts 11:16** [Peter speaking] "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 3:16** John [The Baptist] answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**Titus 3:5** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

**Remember that Paul declared to the Roman congregation that if the Spirit of Christ was not in them, then they did not belong to Him (Romans 8:9).**

 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

**(See also 1 Corinthians 3:9, 6:19; John 14:23, 57; 2 Timothy 1:14; 2 Corinthians 2:16; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 4:13; Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26,27.)**

Salvation is when God’s Spirit is invited into a person’s heart. This is Spiritual Baptism, reborn of Spirit or circumcision of the heart.

Remember, God’s circumcision is of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6) which paves the way for God to place His Spirit into a person (Ezekiel 36). This takes place when a person asks (humbly surrenders) God (Ezekiel 36:37) to give them a new heart and spirit. . . as witnessed when He reached-out to Israel. This is the same as “reborn of Spirit” that Jesus declares to Nicodemus in John 3. Fallen humanity must be spiritually reborn to have a right-standing relationship with God. Without a regenerated heart, which enables a person to have a regenerated mind, a person cannot see, hear or enter the kingdom of God.

**Back to Colossians 2:12**

 Let’s go back to re-examine Colossians 2:12 and Paul’s reference to baptism. . .which one is Paul talking about. . . one or both? Many people receive the context of verses 12-13 to be about water-baptism. **However, how can a person be physically buried and raised with Jesus?** There is not any record of this taking place. So, is Paul talking about something spiritual? The physical act of water-baptism is chronicled in Scripture to witness what had already happened to a person. . . that is salvation.

Once again, we point to Acts 2:37 when the Jews, listening to Peter’s Holy Spirit message, surrendered to God. . . evidenced by their hearts being pierced (circumcised). Then they were eligible to witness their rebirth of spirit in water-baptism described in verse 38.

Similarly, Acts 10 chronicles the Holy Spirit driven events at Cornelius house. Peter had not reached the end of his sermon when the Gentiles in the audience starting speaking in tongues (Holy Spirit gift) evidencing their rebirth of Spirit. A God act. The Holy Spirit only operates in the heart of a Believer. . . people who belong to Christ (Romans 8:9).

 Therefore, at Cornelius’ house, Scripture witnesses to us the spiritual rebirth of people before they were water-baptized. Physical acts of water-baptism do not save. . . they are a work. We know Scripture witnesses to us . . . “8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). (See also 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 4; Galatians 2:16)

**Colossians 2:12** having been buried with Him in baptism,

in which you were also raised up with Him

**through faith in** the **working of God,**

 who raised Him from the dead. **AMEN**