



January 30, 2005

Understanding The Baptism Of John - pt 3

The differences between the baptism of John and that later taught by the apostles and Christians, can be seen in a comparison of certain characteristics.

1. The baptism of John marked the beginning of the teaching of the gospel. Christ brought this out himself (**Lk 16.16**). This is brought out in the fact that under the law, sins were “forgiven” when a specified sacrifice was made. A variety of sacrifices were detailed under the law (**Lev 1-7**). As was noted last week, over the course of time, there was a preoccupation with making the sacrifices and not changing the heart. The baptism of John represented a change of heart and signified the giving of the self to God through repentance, not the intermediate medium of a sacrifice. This goes along very well with the teachings of John when he told the people that there was one who was coming after him and indicated that this was the messiah that had been expected for so long.

2. The baptism of John involved a “confession” of sins, that is, taking responsibility for one’s actions. This was an outward expression of the individual’s desire to repent and be justified in God’s sight. The act of being baptized then was the final step to demonstrate that they had accepted the message of John, and therefore the authority of God, expressed through the prophet. This is what Joel indicates is required in true repentance when he states, “*rend your hearts and not your garments...*” (**Joel 2.13**).

3. The baptism of John did not bring about the remission of sins. It was a looking forward to the time when the final sacrifice would be available, but that blood had not been shed at this time. We learn that the blood of the sacrifices, offered under the law, put the people into contact with Christ’s blood when he died on the cross (**Heb 9.15**). In this manner the baptism of John prepared the way for the reception of that final sacrifice. The baptism of John, however, was not a substitute for the baptism in Jesus name. Those who offered sacrifices under the law, were justified, because they died under the law. Those who were living during this time would have to submit to the will of God through proper obedience once Christ died, was buried and was raised from the dead. If there were those present who were baptized by John, who died before the day of Pentecost, then it is reasonable to conclude that they were justified in the sight of God, having died under the law and having met the commands of God by submission to the prophet’s word.

4. John himself indicated that there was one coming who was greater than he (**John 1.15-27**). This other, Christ, would change the requirements for being justified in the sight of God once the work that he had come into the world to do was completed. It is evident that the baptism of John then would be made inferior to the baptism into Christ, as John was not the Messiah and therefore was not the full revelation of the will of God. The sacrifice of Christ superceded all other commands since it was the will of God that he should be made the head over all things and that in him the fullness of all things to the church, the true people of God, would be contained. On the day of Pentecost it was therefore necessary that those who had been baptized by John were to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins.

5. The above is demonstrated clearly in the story of Apollos. Luke tells us “*a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.*” (**Acts 18.24-25**). Later we find that his error was corrected as Luke records, “*...he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*” (**Acts 18.26**).

The baptism of John demonstrated a desire to serve God and was an affirmation of God’s authority and the individual’s desire to serve the Lord. It was incomplete and therefore not valid after the true sacrifice for the sins of the world was made. With the establishment of the church, everything changed including the manner in which one receives forgiveness from God.

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