

Read also Exodus 14:10-31.

Paul has been all around the “world” of his time and now he is back in ASIA, the area he earlier was prevented from going by the Holy Spirit. Let’s listen to the story. READ Acts 19:1-20



What a great story! Think of the power that the town experienced when devoted disciples came and shared. It was power that could not be compromised for “show” or personal gain, but one that was filled with righteousness for those who seek God with all their heart.

Notice that Paul talks about two baptisms.

The word “baptism” (βαπτίζω) means, in Greek, dip or immerse, or other words having to do with washing. There are two other words to consider: λουό and νιπτό. One means to “wash the whole body;” the second means to “wash partially.”

We must consider the Old Testament meaning, which is ritual purification. It was an identity thing—it could be partial, like the ritual handwashing. Or it was immersion.

Naaman, the Syrian army commander with leprosy, identified with the Jewish God for his healing by submerging himself or “baptizing” in the River Jordan (2 Kings 5). He was “purified” of his leprosy.

Around the time of Christ, if a Gentile converted to Judaism, they were required to 1) be circumcised, 2) take a ritual bath, and 3) offer a sacrifice. It was called βαπτó. It is a “turn” from heathenism. It was also considered an exit from death to life.

John the Baptist called people to “repent” which means to “turn” to righteousness, which is to leave darkness and death for light and life. Their sins were forgiven.

The children of Israel went through the waters of the Red Sea. This would cause drowning. But God brought them through alive! This was the “baptism” of Israel.

The unbelieving Egyptian army who sought to hold them in bondage died in the waters of the Red Sea. **They were judged.**

When a Christian dies, he or she is brought through death to life by faith in Christ. We are “baptized” from death to life. Thus, they are not judged, but their sins are covered by Christ. Those who are not “in Christ” do not survive.

See why it is an initiation? No other major religion baptizes except for Judaism and Christianity.

John was baptizing people in anticipation of the Messiah. He said, “Prepare yourself; repent.” He told people to turn from their sins so they would be ready for Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:2-11a).

John’s baptism of repentance was like the man standing on the road where the bridge is out shouting the warning, “The end is near . . . TURN AROUND!”

That’s what repent means.

Jesus came to keep the end from being disastrous. So think of his approach as being quite different from John’s. Repentance is part—yes. But, when Jesus’ mission was finished, his crucifixion gained us not only forgiveness for sins, but new life; life in the Spirit, and the Spirit helps us live righteously:

“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20a).

Do you see a pattern here? Baptism is a necessary step in salvation in that it is the entry point of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ baptism is with Spirit and fire. We are united in Christ.

When I baptize these children today, it is in the name of Jesus Christ alone.

No other religion baptizes in Jesus’ name.

We have a Book of Confessions which defines baptism so that we understand what it does.

Baptism is this, according to the **Heidelberg Catechism:**

Q. 66. Baptism is a sacrament. The sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals instituted by God in order that the promise of God is sealed in us. Christ's sacrifice accomplished on the cross graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Do you feel guilt? Have you confessed it? Your baptism assures you of that forgiveness. Let's see what the Confessions say:

Q. 69. How does holy Baptism remind and assure you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross avails for you?

Let's read the answer together:

A. In this way: Christ has instituted this external washing with water and by it has promised that I am as certainly washed with his blood and Spirit from the uncleanness of my soul and from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water which is used to remove the dirt from my body.

Therefore, I say to you now, *in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!*

The baptism of Jesus is different from the baptism of John. It's the power of God on us, in us, and through us to help us live a new life.

Here is how we can think of it: Baptism is "to Christ." It relates the believer to Christ in such a way that he or she is "in Christ."

1. We are baptized "**to his death.**" What it means is that for us, baptism is an end to estrangement from God. Remember how God's people went through death at the Red Sea to new life?
2. We are baptized "**to his life.**" What it means is that we walk in the new life!
3. We are baptized "**to the church.**" We are members of the body of Christ. If you feel that you have no one, that is not true! Look around. You have the church as your family!
4. We are baptized "**into the Spirit of Christ.**" You are saturated in the Spirit. The Spirit is poured out on you like the water covers you.

The Spirit is not a generalized sense that is sort of everywhere. It's not some "force." The Holy Spirit is a person – not a human person, but "God in Three Persons," a distinct part of the Godhead. Therefore, the Holy Spirit acts; there are visible signs. Paul displayed them. God gives these signs of grace simply for Jesus' kingdom.

Paul experienced these in an extraordinary way. He was a forerunner for us and operated very closely with the Holy Spirit.

When God does miraculous things, they bring honor to Jesus on this earth. And those visible graces honor all churches, too. Whenever some miracle happens here – and we have seen

miracles here – they reflect the power of God. Do you seek the Holy Spirit? Your baptism opens the opportunity.

Today, I encourage you to pray and ask for more of the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid to live in the Holy Spirit, who helps you in every way when you learn to ask. Today, as these four children are baptized, remember the significance of your own baptism.

AMEN

## Acts 19:1-20

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John." Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus." As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. But some became stubborn, rejecting his message and publicly speaking against the Way. So Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then he held daily discussions at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia -- both Jews and Greeks -- heard the word of the Lord.

God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled. A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. 15 But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.