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Baptism

A Baptism of Repentance for the Forgiveness of Sins

**"You must repent, Peter answered, and every one of you must be baptised
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"
Acts 2:38**



It is written in the Bible's Book of Genesis that God's covenant must be marked on the flesh of our body. It is this directive in the Torah that caused the Israelites to initiate the rite of circumcision.

*"My Covenant shall be marked on your bodies as a Covenant
in perpetuity." (Gen.17:13)*

As a preeminent tenant of the Law this mandate forms a key template for the architecture upon which Jesus structured His Church. We have seen this vividly demonstrated by the transcending role baptism has played in the Christian faith. In the case of the Israelites the mark of the covenant on their bodies took the form of circumcision. Jesus replaced circumcision with baptism -- a baptism that comes in three parts, the first of which is required to be marked on the flesh.

In the Hebrew ritual, circumcision only applied to males. In Christ it applies to everyone -- male, female, old, young, black, white, and so on. The new covenant must be marked on every body that turns to the Lord.

Moreover, it carries with it three anointings. John told those who came to him,

"I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am...and he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt.3:11).

From that day to this, baptism has been the introductory seal applied to all who gain entrance into the Christian Church. The water of this ritual touches us in Christ's death, Paul said, bringing His death into our flesh. In this respect it mimics the Mosaic Law's essential rule regarding atonement, i.e., that the cleansing of God requires a cutting away of the flesh. In the case of Christ, that "cutting away" rids the soul of the entire body, not just a piece of it. It is a "cutting away" that makes room for another entire body to take its place -- the divine "born-again" body implanted into us by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible tells us that the baptism of Christ is a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". A second stipulation of the Law concerning atonement is that God's forgiveness requires our repentance, so the two go together.

"If they sin against you -- for there is no man who does not sin -- and you are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they are led away captive to a land far or near, if in that land of their exile they come to themselves and repent, and in the country of their captivity they entreat you saying, 'We have sinned, we have acted perversely and wickedly', and if they turn again to you with all their heart and soul in the country of their captivity...and pray, turning towards the land you gave their ancestors, towards the city you have chosen, and toward the Temple...hear their prayer and their entreaty, uphold their cause, and forgive your people the sins they have committed against you." (2 Chron.36-39).

These words were Solomon's entreaty to God when he dedicated the Hebrew temple he had built in Jerusalem. That very night God appeared to Solomon and answered his plea.

"...if my people who bear my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my presence and turn from their wicked ways, I myself will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their land." (2 Chron.7:14).

From that day on (from the moment Solomon dedicated the temple) confession of sins and repentance became essential elements of the atonement process in the Hebrew religion. Jesus, when He came, did not do away with the elements of Solomon's petition to God. He

kept the template of this petition, but He redefined the "land", the "city" and the "Temple" in spiritual terms. The land of promise, Jesus said, was the kingdom of heaven. The city of Jerusalem, the holy city hidden within that kingdom and the Temple, John revealed, was both Jesus and God together (Rev.21:22).

The two requirements of the Law, repentance and the mark of the covenant on our bodies, were fulfilled completely when Jesus preached *"a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."* (Mark 1:4).

"...and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins." Mark 1:4-5.

Forgiveness and baptism, both made adamant by the Gospel, became essential and interlocked elements from then on. By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has offered atonement to every person on earth for sin. He offered that sacrifice within the Law (according to terms specified by the Law of Moses), and to share in it we must accept his offer of redemption in the same legal way that it was offered -- in accordance with the terms specified by Moses.

Jesus took us out of the Law, but He did it legally. The Law itself has defined the conditions for our break from it. That is why God instituted these conditions in the format of His new covenant. We must accept the blood He shed for us in the same way that it was given -- physically. Baptism is that legal acceptance -- it is the covenant physically marked on our bodies in accordance with the rules of scripture. That is why the new covenant is marked on our flesh (Gen.17:13) with the water of baptism (1 Peter 3:21), under conditions of deep repentance (Ps.32:5; Chron.7:14).

These are the two conditions the template of Moses has placed between us and our reunion with God through Jesus Christ. One spiritual, the other legal. Our soul, then, is cleansed by the vow, but it is set free by the water. When the mark of the cross touches our bodies and physically anoints us in God's new covenant, at that moment, Paul said, His death becomes our own, both physically and legally.

It is legal because the mark is administered through the Law -- by a physical ritual of theology.

Legally separating us from the Law, it is the last act of the Law on us. It is the booth we must stop at on our way out of the prison of Satan because it is this seal that legally unchains us from the Law's power. This is why Paul said,

"Through the Law I am dead to the Law, so that now I can live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now, not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me."
(Gal.2:19).

The water itself does not cleanse us. It is not for cleansing that we are touched by water, it is the legal stamp that takes us out of legal. It is a public mark signifying our affirmation that we have repented in the name of Christ Jesus.

It is our deep repentance that cleanses us. So while it is in faith and spirit that we come to the life Jesus offered, it is in the flesh that we lose our bondage to the Law.

Through faith and repentance, the water that touches our body is invisibly cloaked in the blood of Christ. When we are touched in it, His death becomes our own.

By dying in the body through baptism, our soul is set free legally, not just from the body, but also from the Law which held it there, so that it can rise again through spiritual faith -- free from the corrupting influence of this world.

Paul said that God allowed Jesus to be taken out of the city when He was crucified in order that we might know that His sacrifice was taking us out of the penalty and terms of the Law. His leaving sinful Jerusalem, then, and being transported out to Calvary Hill was metaphoric.

By marking us through the Law, God has made a way for us to leave legally, so that, in leaving, we do not have to be fugitives from the law.

"Go away, go away, leave that place, touch nothing unclean. Get out of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. But you are not to hurry away, you are not to leave like fugitives. No the Lord will go in front of you, and the God of Israel will be your rear-guard." (Is.52:11-12).

Since the earliest days of man's creation, humankind has been fascinated and obsessed with blood sacrifice to God. Even the Aztecs and Inca's in the new world, outside of contact with the peoples across the ocean conducted these bloody rituals. There must be something innate in man to drive him so universally to this kind of worship. And it is in keeping with this universal desire that God has instrumented His merciful formula for atonement.

God addressed this need in the very beginning, with Abraham. He led Abraham to the rock of Mt. Moriah with his son, Issac in tow and put it in Abraham's mind to lift a blade against the boy as a sacrifice. Abraham, full of faith, complied. But God stopped him. Human sacrifice will not be a part of Hebrew worship. Instead, said God, I have supplied a substitute.

Above Abraham's head there was a ram entangled in the brush. Moses incorporated this event into His Law, and thereafter, for the guardian of the Law, the substitute became all the helpless animals of later Hebrew sacrifice.

But God was not thinking of animals when He appeared to Abraham. He was referencing His own Son. The sacrifice is our own. We are born on this planet under the penalty of the Law and therefore under a sentence of death. So we are like Issac, about to be struck by the knife of God's Law because Satan has contaminated us with his fatal sin. But God has stopped the knife.

He provided a substitute in the form of His own Son, Jesus Christ, who went to cross in our place. He died there so that we do not have to. And so we have been redeemed by a blood sacrifice.

This answers two of the deepest mysteries in the Christian covenant. Why did a God of pure and infinite love purposely allow His Son to be the subject of intense torture and a violent death on a cross; and why, when everything that Jesus taught about the love of God being spiritual, do we have to come into that love through a physical and legal action marked on our human flesh?

The major reason lies in God's ordination that the Law of Moses be kept in precise terms until its entire purpose is achieved. (Mt.5:17-19). Jesus could overcome the Law only by completing it. That is why He followed the Mosaic template so closely. He told us this.

Another reason concerns humanity's innate obsession for blood sacrifice. In order to change that obsession, God had to address it directly.

All humanity is born into the captivity of sin and for this reason stands condemned to death by the dictates of God's Law. Jesus set us free from the bondage of this Law. Yet he did it in a very legal way -- in a way that did not violate the Mosaic code.

That is what the crucifixion is -- it is a legal payment made in our name. And baptism by water is our own legal public vow to accept His payment as our own. The water in baptism duplicates the nails and blood of the cross by physically touching our bodies in Christ's sacrifice. At that moment we die to our flesh and become reborn in the Spirit.

In His power and authority God could have said that the rules of Moses were too violent, and swept away the decree of the Law. But God is ultimate justice. It is judges among men that bend the rules and show partiality to close friends. God does not bend the rules for anyone. If He did, His justice would not be perfect.

And as far as the violence itself is concerned, it's very viciousness deeply underscores the intense contrast between good and evil. Wickedness is not innocuous or benign. Unless counteracted by Jesus, sin kills everyone it touches.

So that we might see the reality of this truth, God has constructed both a creation and a salvation to reflect it. In that reality, the wicked strike out continuously at the people who love God and His peace, but their deadly and slanderous daggers have no impact on the life that lies within the flesh of those they try to harm. Instead, they kill themselves, because this world is a test, and anyone who chooses to pursue violence, strike only themselves and fail the exam.

We were all born in this world condemned to eternal death because of Satan. Our choice in this life is one of finding a way out of hell's destiny, not of being thrown into it. Jesus came to offer us redemption from a sentence already decreed. He brought us a way of escape from a sentence already passed.

Because of Satan every person on earth is going to die -- everyone who refuses to accept God's only path away from that fatal verdict. When Christ appeared, all mankind sat on death row awaiting the execution of the Law's decree.

He came to us as the governor's Son; in His hand a pardon from the sentence and freedom from the prison. Those who choose to follow the Way of Life specified by Jesus receive pardon from the Law's decree and are transported by faith out of death's prison into reconciliation with God, bypassing the preordained execution.

Everyone who rejects Christ's divine offer and chooses to follow Babylon's way of life, remains attached to the fatal destiny of the place where they were born. They remain locked in Satan's bondage and doomed to share in Satan's destiny. So the only offer is life. Jesus brought us a chance to escape -- a chance to live forever.

THE MOSAIC LAW

The Law is the template of God's test. His mercy and His wrath, once specified, can only be altered by terms set forth in this template. That is why a legal component to salvation exists. If it were otherwise, God could be accused of breaking the law.

Because He has tempered the Law with mercy, He has made the Law not only perfect but ultimately righteous as well. But in order to get us there -- to move us from the Law of Judgment (Moses) into the Law of mercy and compassion, God had to pay the debt of the first so that we would be completely free to join with him in the second.

While His payment of this debt made salvation possible, the forgiveness that comes from the cross can only be passed into us through our own personal acceptance of His offer. We officially express that acceptance in two ways -- one, through a vow of repentance, and two, publicly acknowledging that conversion through the ceremony of baptism.

Jesus did not want to go to the cross. So that we would understand this, he asked God to remove the 'cup' of the cross from him if it were at all possible. God did not; therefore it wasn't. God was showing us that the Law was so powerful and binding that even He could not spare His Son and still rescue us from the penalty it imposed.

Because God had given His oath of authority to Moses, He was bound by the rules that were set down by Moses. God could have used His immense power to simply sweep away the Law, but He didn't do this because that would have put God outside the Law. Instead of erasing the Law, God had Jesus keep it and fulfill every word in it. That made everything that Jesus did legal even by this world's standards.

Jesus told his disciples that the things he did were done so that the Law and the Prophets would be fulfilled. He said, "scripture cannot be rejected" (Jn.10:35).

By keeping scripture on purpose, Jesus made the prophecies self-fulfilling, showing that he was not completing prophecy, but obeying the Law.

Jesus kept scripture because it was the law, and as such it was binding on both man and God.

On the surface it seemed like prophecy because who in the world was inspired enough to sift through a sealed scripture, written in academic terms known only to a small handful of Judaism's finest scholars, and not only decipher it, but understand it so completely as to fulfill its terms?

"...So will the crowds be astonished at him, and kings stand speechless before him; for they shall see something never told and witness something never heard before: 'Who could believe what we have heard, and to whom has the power of God been revealed?'

"Like a sapling he grew up in front of us, like a root in arid ground. Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes...he was despised and we took no account of him. And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed." (Is.53:1-5).

If God had Jesus go to these lengths to see that the words of the Old Testament were

precisely fulfilled, there can be no doubt the lengths to which He will go to see that all the words of the New Testament will be kept as well.

BAPTISM REMOVES US FROM THE LAW

If the Law was so powerful that Jesus had to die on the cross because of it, then it stands to reason that we will remain completely bound in it if we do not accept the baptism of water that Jesus offered us as our only way out of it.

It was not enough for Jesus simply go to the cross in spirit, and it is not enough for us to be baptised only in spirit. His death was physical and it has to touch us physically in order for our chains of bondage to be broken. Jesus had himself baptised as an example for us to follow even though John said that He did not need it (Mt.3:13). Jesus did not need baptism because he had no sin in Him. "Now you know that he appeared in order to abolish sin, and that in him there is no sin..." (1 John 3:5).

So that he could show us how completely locked into the Law we are if we refuse to be baptised, Jesus said that the pharisees blocked the salvation God had in mind for them by refusing to receive John's anointing: "All the people who heard him, and the tax collectors too, acknowledged God's plan by accepting baptism from John; but by refusing baptism from him the Pharisees and the lawyers thwarted what God had in mind for them." (Luke 7:29-30). This shows that it is God's intention to offer salvation as a free gift to anyone who wants it, even to people like the Pharisees, but in order for them to receive that salvation, they have to accept it legally not just spiritually.

Until we have been baptised with water we cannot say that Jesus died for us personally. Baptism does not assure us of salvation, but it imparts a grace around us that keeps us safe from spiritual harm, allowing us both freedom and time to make the journey Jesus marked out for us.

Just as the Israelites had to follow Moses through the wilderness of Sinai on a long journey towards the 'Promised Land', so do we have to follow the path that Jesus provided for us in the form of his words. The grace that God gives us through baptism is is a 'time of mercy' to make this journey.

The time of God's grace is extended through repentance, but cut short by apostasy. Therefore, God's grace is made variable by our own actions. "But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruits...yes, even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire." (Luke 3:8-9).

Some teach that Jesus took us out of the Law because it is evil. That is not true. Paul said that it is we, ourselves who are evil, not the Law. Paul preached this teaching because he knew that the Law came from the authority of God. "The Law is sacred, and what it commands is sacred and just and good." (Rom.7:11).

The problem, Paul observed, is that WE are not good. We are filled with the spirit of sin -- an unholy spirit that comes from Satan. This is why John wrote that we are all sinners (Jn.1:8-10). Because of sin's presence within us, we react to the Law in hostile terms. We become obsessed with doing the very things we have been commanded not to do. We become incensed whenever we are told, 'no' -- that very directive creating within us an urge to sin even more.

Our rebelliousness drives that urge into obsession. Because of our sinful nature the Law has made it easier for Satan to kill us. "Does that mean that something good has killed me? Of course not. But sin, to show itself in its true colors, has used that good thing (the Law) to kill me; so thanks to the commandment, sin is able to exercise all of its sinful power" (Rom.7:12-13).

Because we are weak and often stumble along the journey, we stand condemned by the Law throughout our entire life. This is why it became so essential for Jesus to set us free from the Law (and its power of condemnation) in order to rescue us. Baptism cuts the chains and allows us to make the journey out of Satan's prison without fear -- because with it comes the robe of Grace that protects us from every fall as long as we get back on God's road. "Though the virtuous man falls seven times, he stands up again." (Pr.24:16).

Anyone who wants to come to Jesus must be baptised in His name for the forgiveness of their sins. This is the message John the Baptist proclaimed from the beginning. (Mt.3:11). So did Peter and Paul. "You must repent," Peter answered "and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (Acts 2:38).

Even Jesus, himself, said so. "Unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5).

Because there is an incident in the Bible where salvation occurred outside of baptism, some have questioned this need. When Christ was crucified, one of the thieves who was on the cross next to him asked Jesus if he could go into heaven with him when he died. Jesus accepted his request. Since the thief had apparently not been baptised in Christ's name before his crucifixion, some say that this proves that baptism with water is not essential to salvation.

There is something we need to remember here. According to Paul, baptism with water is our share of Jesus' crucifixion. It is the way we share in His death. According to Christian

belief, we are baptised into His death. The thief shared in Christ's actual crucifixion, right next to him at the very same moment. He shared in Jesus' death in a very real way. Our baptism into Jesus' death is far easier.

Second, there was no Holy Spirit on earth yet when this event occurred.

"As scripture says: from his breast shall flow fountains of living water. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified." (Jn.7:38-39).

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, 52 days after the crucifixion. Therefore, the thief was in a different venue than the rest of us. He was never baptised with the Holy Spirit -- which is our share in Jesus' new life; and as we all know, essential to salvation under the new covenant. This means that the thief came to God in the same way that Moses and Abraham and John the Baptist did; through faith, but under the old standards. His situation is unique as far as Christians today are concerned.

In the early days of Christianity, church leaders saw no difference between baptism and salvation. They felt that baptism imparted a perfection that a person had to maintain rigidly throughout life. A slip or a fall after baptism was seen as fatal. Later as church leaders came to grips with the reality of human behavior, and more important, increasingly aware of the Holy Spirit's true intentions, they became more lenient in their thinking. They realized that the mercy of Jesus imparted a grace that protects us from stumbling in our faith.

In those early years many Christians began putting off being baptised until old age or until they were on their death-bed so that they could be certain that they could be made perfect at the last possible minute, minimizing the risk of stumbling and losing their chance at heaven. Church officials came to realize through such behavior that baptism was just one part of a larger atonement picture.

A BAPTISM IN THREE PARTS

John the baptist told his followers, "I baptise you with water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am...he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Mt.3:11). By this, John showed that there are three parts to every Christian baptism. One visible, two invisible.

This three-tiered pattern of atonement follows not only the three essential components of

the Godhead, it also mimics the three elements of the Exodus -- the event memorialized by the Hebrew celebration of 'Passover'. The Hebrew flight from Egypt prefigured the structure of God's atonement process, because it duplicates our exodus from Babylon. The Passover has three parts.

The first 'passover' occurred in Egypt when the Israelites painted the door-stops of their houses with the blood of the paschal lamb. (Exodus 12:1-14). Since the Avenging Angel was sent to kill all of the first-born children in Egypt (all first-born children, not just Egyptian children), the blood of the lamb signaled which houses were to be 'passed over' and the children spared.

This marking of the house with the blood of the Paschal Lamb formed the template in the Law of Moses for baptism in Christ. Like the mark of blood at the time of Moses, baptism keeps away the destruction of the Avenger. "Wait before you do any damage...until we have put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." (Rv.7:3). "...kill and exterminate them all. But do not touch anyone with a cross on his forehead." (Ez.9:6).

While we are touched in water in a physical baptism, the 'mark' which corresponds to the true blood of Christ is spiritual. It is a mark of forgiveness that has cleansed our soul. Therefore, it relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The second stage of Israel's 'passover' occurred in the Old Testament when God parted the waters of the Red Sea and the Israelites 'passed over' the seabed out of Egypt.

Like the first passover, this aspect of the Exodus, also formed a template for atonement in Christ. Peter described God's salvation of Noah and his family on an ark at the time of the Flood as a 'type' of the water which saves us at baptism (1 Peter 3:21). And here again, in Egypt, is a rescue based on water. The Israelites passed through the walls of water, walking on dry land to salvation, across the seabed. This, too, is a type of the salvation by water that God has decreed; because it fulfills the template.

The third 'passover' was the 40-year journey across Sinai that brought the Israelites to the Promised Land. This was a circuitous route that produced great trials for the Israelites, most of whom were constantly backsliding and continually complaining about the rigors of the journey. It corresponds to the baptism of fire because it constitutes a time of intense trial on a long journey to the kingdom of the Lord.

The baptism of fire is the path of Christ's Gospel as we try to live it in our lives. Through the trials that come to us as we try to follow the commandments of Jesus in our lives we learn to choose God and reject the things of this world that used to be our gods. It is fire because it is hard. That harshness mimics the Israelite journey across the Sinai made to prefigure it.

Choosing Jesus requires real sacrifices because we have to reject many things our flesh covets. Thus the baptism of fire comes to us in stages and continues in us, lasting our whole life long. For the Israelites coming out of Egypt, this fire was the difficult journey across the desert of Sinai, a journey made much more difficult by their persistent rebellion. A journey that should have only taken a few weeks took forty-years because of their constant disobedience.

During that time, many became discouraged by the hardships they faced and craved their prior lives. Turning back to Egypt, they cut themselves off from God's plan for them. By the power of faith, we have the protection of God's grace (like a wall that encircles us completely) to keep us safe from harm throughout our journey so that what happened to the Israelites will not happen to us.

God's grace enables us to stumble and not be destroyed as long as we get up and continue in the path of Christ.

Together, all three 'passovers' at the time of Moses made up the completed Passover of the House of Israel out of the captivity of Egypt and into the Promised Land of God's covenant. In this passover sequence, Moses architected the structure of the atonement process for the "guardian" Mosaic Law. God followed this template in the three baptisms of Jesus Christ which is the true atonement process -- the "True Father" replacing the guardianship of Moses. The three baptisms in Christ define the true salvation-exodus in the plan of God.

Our physical body is the house of our soul, and for this reason it corresponds to the house each Israelite lived in while in Egypt. They left their Egyptian houses forever that night in Egypt when they marked them with the blood of the lamb and followed Moses. And, by baptism, Paul taught, we die to our flesh the moment we are baptised.

"You have been taught that when we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death; in other words, when we were baptised, we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection. We must also realize that our former selves have been crucified with him to destroy this sinful body and to free us from the slavery of sin." (Rom.6:1-11).

The water touches us with his death so that we can share his payment of the penalty of the Law in our place. The avenging angel that God sent into Egypt was under orders to spare those who had painted the doorstops of their houses with the blood of the lamb.

The prophecy of Ezekiel has shown that the plague that killed all the 'first-born' in Egypt corresponds to an even greater plague destined to occur during the days of the new Covenant-this time to the whole world: "God spoke to the man in white and told him,

'Go all through the city and mark a cross on the foreheads of all who deplore and disapprove of the filth practiced in it', and then I heard him say to the others, 'Follow the man in white through the city, and strike. Show neither pity nor mercy...kill them all. But do not touch anyone with a cross on his forehead.'" (Ez. 9).

Just as in Egypt, the plague that strikes the unbaptised is death. The death of the first-born in Egypt was preparing the world to understand the death of the first-born creation that Jesus came to warn us about. The first-born creation is that which currently inhabits the earth -- i.e. all who live in the flesh.

The second-born creation are those resurrected by Christ into the new creation which is the kingdom of God.

These two creations house within them the first and second death. It is the death of the first-born creation that ends the world. This is the death of the flesh. The second death comes to anyone who refuses to follow Christ.

Everyone born into the current world is a part of the first-born creation. The kingdom of heaven that Jesus is calling us to is the second creation and to enter it we must be born-again a second time. This teaching is so fundamental to Christianity that Paul called it a part of the "milk" of Christ's teaching. Our flesh dies in baptism and is replaced by the Holy Spirit, so that we can shed our worldly body and be clothed in the garment of the kingdom of heaven -- an eternal body that cannot ever die. In the kingdom of God there is no death.

Baptism by water starts the atonement process, but by itself, is not enough for eternal life. We can see this in the 'Exodus' template. Even though they all marked their houses with the blood of the Pascal Lamb, not every Israelite who left Egypt survived to enter the Promised Land.

"Even though they ate from the rock that was Christ and even though they drank from the rock that was Christ, their corpses littered the desert because they failed to please God." (1 Cor.10:8).

Paul's words show that there is more to salvation than baptism. The blood of the lamb did

not insure that the Israelites in Egypt would get to the 'Promised Land'; only that they would be safe from the last great plague that was coming to destroy all the first-born children in the land of Egypt.. Since the Israelites lived at the time in Egypt, they, too, were subject to the same plagues that God sent against that country. This is why God had to protect them with His grace. The mark they painted on the doorstops of their houses showed the Avenging Angel which houses to bypass.

We are in this world, and therefore, we are subject to the plagues that sin brings against it, just as the Israelites were subject to the plagues that came against Egypt. We wash ourselves in the blood of Jesus through baptism to receive perfect grace for safety against the ultimate plague of death. But, like those Israelites who failed to reach the Promised Land after they left Egypt, baptism of water alone does not insure that we will reach our destination if we do not change our ways.

BAPTISM AND THE LAW

Without repentance and conversion, baptism of water cannot save us by itself. "Unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5). "You must repent," Peter told them, "and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (Acts 2:38). This is a New Testament commandment. It shows in clear terms that without baptism, there can be no salvation at all. Peter issued this binding directive because Jesus did not steal us from the Law; he took us out of it legally, by a legal act.

In some Christian circles it is commonly taught that there is no law; that Christ did away with it completely when he nailed it on the cross with himself. Thus, many Christians believe that there should be no discussion or mention of the Law at all because any such discussion is an anachronism. But the Law ceases to exist only for those who have been baptised.

We have seen that Jesus takes away the sins only of those who believe in Him and are willing to accept His death as their own. For all the others, their sin remains. If this were not so, there would be no reason to preach repentance in His name. His action would have crucified the need for repentance and preaching altogether -- meaning that everyone on earth today would be sinless.

This, of course, is not true. The world is still filled with sin and it is only those who have been baptised in the name of Jesus who have broken with sin. Jesus and a baptism of repentance are preached today because so many people still remain under the influence and penalty of the Law. Far from being gone, the Law is still very much a part of this world. Baptism is the only action by which the Law can be taken away. By legally separating us

from the kingdom of this world, baptism in Christ actually takes away our citizenship in it.

In the place of world nationality we have been offered citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. There is no dual citizenship. We cannot be citizens of both the kingdom of heaven and this world at the same time. Once baptised, we are stripped of carnal residency and become foreigners to this world, existing in it as ambassadors for Jesus with all the rights and privileges of that office including diplomatic immunity from the Law. Such is the scope of grace. In Christ we are dead to the Law.

God expects us to obey the rules of this world while we are in it, but we are no longer tied to the world court. Spiritually, the world court is ruled by the Law of Moses and it is this law that condemns everyone in the world to death (most of them, because they are considered Gentiles (pagans), and therefore outside of the Law's mercy). Those inside the Law are condemned because they cannot keep its terms: "Did not Moses give you the Law? And yet not one of you keeps the Law!" (Jn.7:19).

Everyone who has not been baptised falls under the rules and dominion of the world court and is fully subject to all the penalties specified by the Law of Moses. This judiciary is not a court of men. It is ruled, instead, by angels and its composition consists of all the penalties in the Old Testament. It brings plagues, famine, earthquakes and all the assorted disasters specified by the Law. It is not God's judgment -- God's judgment comes later. It is a reaction to sin built right into the mechanics of creation.

At the time of Paul, the law was measured by circumcision because it was this procedure which brought the Jewish male into the covenant of the Law. Because baptism does the reverse, taking us out of the Law, the two represent polar opposites of the same process.

Both circumcision and baptism represent a 'cutting off of the flesh' for purification:

"In him you have been circumcised, with a circumcision not performed by human hand, but by the complete stripping of your body of flesh. This is circumcision according to Christ. You have been buried with him, when you were baptised; and by baptism, too, you have been raised up with him through your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead." (Col.2:13).

The Law existed even before God authorized Moses to make it known to us. We can be certain of that because death and suffering were already going on in this world before Moses was born. As we have seen before, Moses did not invent the Law, he was simply authorized by God to explain it. Moses gave the Law to the world by divine authority, but he represented the "guardian", not the true Father. Moses was a man; he was not God and

his words did not come from heaven.

"I tell you most solemnly, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that a man may eat it and not die." (John 6:32-51).

Even though God gave the words of Moses divine authority, the words he spoke were not God's own words. They are, however, the words that govern this world (they represent a divine law that governs this world) and that is bringing this world to an end because of wickedness. The words of Moses form an irrevocable template for disaster in the face of sin. They dictate that every person on earth (outside of Jesus) is a sinner and condemned to death by Law.

While the words of Moses describe harsh punishment for sin, the words of Jesus offer reconciliation and peace because Jesus came to save us from the Law and all of its rigorous penalties.

Since we live in a world in which the majority of its inhabitants are unbaptised, most of the people of this world are still bound to the Law that condemns them. The only way to escape this law is baptism in God's offer of reconciliation in the name of Jesus. Because two-thirds of the world's people are unbaptised, most of the world still stands condemned by the Law.

God has offered baptism as a way to save all these people from eternal death. The entrance of the Holy Spirit into a person is the event that is called 'being born-again' (John 3:1-8). This is the second of the three baptisms in Christ. It was revealed by John the Baptist (Mt.3:11).

The Holy Spirit does not need a sacrament (a law) to enter into us. The entrance of the Spirit is spiritual and occurs entirely through faith. In some people the indwelling Spirit causes them to speak in tongues, but usually the presence of the Spirit is much more subtle. We can always be certain that the Holy Spirit is inside us if we are trying to follow Jesus' teachings, because the essential function of the Spirit is to lead us in Christ's footsteps.

At the time of Christ, baptism was offered immediately and freely to anyone who asked for it. Although he reprimanded the pharisees for their sins, John the Baptist did not refuse to baptise anyone who came to him at the Jordan river. He would have baptised the Pharisees, too, if they had desired it. In Acts 2:41, Peter and the apostles baptised over three thousand people in a single day.

There were no waiting periods and no age restrictions. Not at first. The restrictions came with theology. As theologians tried to wrestle with the meaning of baptism and their understanding of its implications (since it is a legal act), liturgical restrictions began to increase. Today, all sorts of rules apply, and infant baptisms are rejected completely by a few not properly schooled in fundamental Christianity or prophecy.

BAPTISM OF BABIES

When he was speaking about the Great Flood (when God saved only 8 people on earth by water), Peter said, "That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience..." (1 Peter 3:20-21). In the case of babies, this pledge is affirmed by the guardians of that child, usually the parents. It is like a loan of grace given to the child through the co-signature of the parents.

But there comes a time when each person must consecrate the pledge on their own. They are made free of the bondage of the Law immediately by the water, but when they reach the age of reason they must confirm their baptism by faith so that the Holy Spirit can come into them. This event, sacramentally, is called confirmation and involves an anointment with oil, or a laying on of hands before the witness of the church. Babies not baptised remain in the Law. Christ can still rescue them, but they have been placed in harm's way.

Baptism is so easy that it is only a matter of legal doctrine and theological conviction that refuses infants from the sacrament. It is certainly not love or compassion. It is simply theory acted out by unbending religious bureaucrats -- i.e., individuals in the same venue as those defined by Jesus when He said, "Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! you who shut up the kingdom of heaven in men's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go in who want to." (Matt.23:8)

The validity of infant baptism has been proved by time. For almost 2000 years all Christian churches have been baptising babies. Practically none of these baptisms was ever repeated during the child's lifetime. Since virtually all of Christianity has received their baptism in the Lord in this way, it stands to reason that infant baptism is effective and fully meets the criteria of God.

If the baptism of babies was insufficient to satisfy the demands of the Law, virtually all of Christianity would have been lost to God on a technicality of theology. God came to save, not to destroy. He did not go to all the trouble of spending billions of years to create an environment for our salvation, and when it was ready, sending His Son to die on the cross,

just to axe it all on a legal technicality.

IS BAPTISM NECESSARY TO SALVATION?

The fundamental question, therefore, is not whether babies should be baptised, but whether or not baptism itself is essential to salvation. There are so many references to the demand for the water of baptism in the scriptures that there can be no doubt of its necessity. Jesus not only described it as essential, he had himself baptised by water to prove it. He wanted baptism to go to everybody. That is why God did not restrict the power to baptise only to a special elite group. He made it easy. Every baptised Christian on earth has the same power to baptise another into the faith of Christ as does the highest official of the largest Christian church.

The essence of the Law in Jerusalem was the temple. By its authority, the temple in that city had authority over the seat of Moses. For this reason it had absolute dominion over the Law. Jesus referred to himself as a temple when he said, "Tear this temple down and in three days I will rebuild it."

John revealed that Jesus was greater than the terrestrial temple:

"In the spirit I saw Jerusalem, the holy city , coming down from God out of heaven...I saw that there was no temple in the city since the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple..." (Rev.21:10, 22).

Jesus said, "I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them." (Mt.18:19-20). The presence of Jesus gives every group formed in his name, authority over the Law on earth; and because Jesus is greater than the temple in Jerusalem (Mt.12:6), those who are formed in His name actually have more authority over the Law than did the priests of the Sanhedrin who governed the temple in the land of Palestine.

Once baptised, each person becomes, in himself, the temple of God because Jesus and God now dwell within that person's soul and body.

"Didn't you realize that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living within you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy him, because the temple of God is sacred; and you are that temple." (1 Cor.3:16-

17).

The power derived from this restructuring of the temple gave faith full authority over the Law. That is why Christian leaders were able to restructure it according to the directives of Christ. And that is why every Christian can perform legal baptisms in the name of Jesus Christ. Possessing the temple inside them, those who gather in His name have more power than the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

Our power to control the Law through faith is not for the purpose of making Jesus a slave to our own theology; but to pass the crucifixion of Jesus into the flesh of the world through baptism. It gives us the means to set up churches and legally baptise the world in Christ's death so that the mercy of Jesus can be spread to every person on earth. When the disciples tried to stop a man who was not one of their own group from working miracles in Jesus' name, Jesus told them, "You must not stop him...Anyone who is not against us is for us." (Mk.9:38-40).

That which is legal only satisfies the Law. It is not a tacit guarantee of holiness as far as God is concerned. In the Book of Revelations, all seven of the churches that the Holy Spirit sent messages to were legal, but they were not all equally holy. Jesus taught that what God wanted from us was obedience to His words. Therefore, while it is true that we are no longer subject to the Law as far as salvation is concerned, we are obliged to keep the Law and obey the traditions set down by the ministers of the church so that righteousness is served.

Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do; since they do not practice what they preach." (Mt.23:1-3). Jesus has called us into obedience, both to his commandments and to our church.

In the early church, as Christianity was growing and the people were beginning to learn that there were indeed wolves disguised as rams among the faithful, a debate arose about the role of baptism in such cases. What if a scoundrel, disguised as a minister were to baptise a person? How could the Holy Spirit go into a person at the direction of a dissolute sinner?

Influenced by the Holy Spirit, they decided that it is the faith of the believer that makes the sacrament work, not the faith of the one who is performing the baptism. While the minister of the Law is doing his part, simultaneous with that, the angels of God are administering an invisible cross on the soul of the baptised person, and it is that mark which gives grace. While there have been many honest and holy ministers in Christ, the Law has a long history of reprobates administering it as well; so God has created a sacrament which has neutralized their impact.

CHURCH OR FAITH

Not only can good theology not save us, bad theology can't hurt us if we live obediently in the words of Jesus. Our faith protects us. Jeremiah said that in our time, the least would know God as much as the greatest. (Jer.31:34). In other words, because of the Gospel, the most illiterate Christian on earth knows as much about God as the most brilliant professor at the best Christian university. Knowledge of God comes from the Holy Spirit, not from an education, and salvation comes from Jesus Christ, not from this or that church. No church can offer eternal life. The churches offer Jesus and it is Jesus alone that imparts eternal life into those who do His will.

When Paul said that Jesus has taken us outside of the Law with him, that is what he means. God has sent His Christ down to earth with a religion which makes a Mormon like a Samaritan. Anyone who puts the words of Jesus into practice is as acceptable to God as a Lutheran or Catholic or Fundamentalist or Baptist who does the same. God has used the church to promote baptism on earth and to bring us to the four Gospels of the New Testament for salvation. If we are baptised and live our lives in the faith of Jesus we will be saved.

Baptism is not a gift of the church, it is a gift of God. Jesus died on the cross so that all men on earth could be baptised in his death and thus separated from the penalty of the Law. This is why few Christian churches require converts from other Christian churches to be re-baptised. Most of them recognize that every baptism in Jesus Christ is an authority greater than the church in which that baptism has taken place.

While Many people think that baptism is a legal initiation into a particular church, i.e., baptised Catholic or Methodist or Baptist, etc., it is just the opposite. Baptism doesn't bring us into theology, it takes us out of theology. Paul was very upset when the churches started to fragment into theological clusters. "Has Christ been parceled out?" he asked. Today, of course, there are tens of thousands of such assemblies, many of them claiming to be the only church on earth that Jesus really loves.

They are wrong because baptism does not parcel us out as tradition has done with the churches. Baptism gathers us into one invisible Body of Christ. It is baptism that makes us all one Church. The fact that it is made complete by faith in Jesus Christ is signified by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

THE TIMING OF BAPTISM

While infants receive the Holy Spirit after they have received the water of baptism, some people receive the Holy Spirit before they have been baptised. An example of this occurred at the time of Peter:

"While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the pagans too, since they could hear them speaking strange languages and proclaiming the greatness of God. Peter himself then said, 'Could anyone refuse the water of baptism to these people, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as much as we have?' He then gave orders for them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 10:44-48).

What this shows is that the three baptisms of Jesus do not always come together at exactly the same time. When Peter later went to Jerusalem and was asked about this situation he said,

"I had scarcely begun to speak when the Holy Spirit came down on them in the same way as it came on us at the beginning, and I remembered that the Lord had said, 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. I realized then that God was giving them the identical thing he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Acts 11:15-17).

A person can be baptised in fire and the Spirit before they receive the water, as with those who have lived in Christ long before being formally baptised, or by the water before they receive the Spirit, as in the case of infants who are baptised in the Lord at the beginning of their lives. In both cases, the need for baptism is accomplished the same. The baptism of the one who waited until the end of his life is no greater than that of the baby who received the water in the very first weeks of life.

Whenever the water is received, it satisfies the Law's demand by marking us with Christ's crucifixion, and for this reason, it does not ever have to be repeated. More important, coming with the water is an invisible spiritual cloak of protection called grace. For this reason, it can be argued that baptism should be administered as early as possible.

WILLFUL REFUSAL TO BE BAPTISED

While it is entirely conceivable that God can save someone who is unbaptised, to willfully not be baptised despite all the cautions in the New Testament that baptism is necessary to salvation, blatantly puts God to the test. It is like a person jumping off a building to prove that God will protect them.

To ignore the commandments of Jesus and the apostles simply to prove a personal theological ideology is deliberate rebellion against God. Refusing to be baptised, or to put off being baptised in the face of these commands, is purposeful disobedience of the scriptures.

"God says this: Put yourselves on the ways of long ago; enquire about the ancient paths: which was the good way? Take it then, and you shall find rest. Instead they have said, 'We will not take it'. I posted look-outs on their behalf: Listen to the sound of the trumpet! But they answered, 'We will not listen'. Then hear, you nations, and know, assembly, what I will do to them. Hear, earth! I am bringing a disaster on this people: it is the fruit of their apostasy, since they have not listened to my words and, as far as my Law, they have rejected that." (Jer.6:16-19).

The people that Jeremiah was referring to were not atheists, they were following their own intuition about God. Through self-interest, they were trying to conform God to their own personal theological bias, and it is this bias that they were teaching their people to follow.

The most important lesson Jesus taught the world was that he, alone, was the source of salvation. We cannot trust our own intuition and we cannot trust our religious leaders. The Jews could not trust the priests or scribes or pharisees. Because they chose to follow the teaching of their Rabbi's and reject the commandments of Jesus, the Jews did exactly what the rebels of the House of Israel did when they mutinied against God in the journey out of Egypt across the Sinai at the time of Moses. Through willful rebellion, they blocked God's plan for them.

To appease them in their defiance, Aaron, the High Priest (Moses' brother) built them a false idol in the form of a golden calf. This shows clearly that we must listen to God and do precisely what He says, no matter who tells us otherwise -- even an official of the Church. Aaron was the High Priest when he relented and built the people that golden calf they were clamoring for. Our personal theological ideas, and those of others, cannot be our guide.

Jeremiah said, "The priests teach whatever they please and my people love it, but when the end comes, then what will you

do?" (Jer.5:31).

God will hold each of us personally responsible for our own behavior with respect to Jesus Christ. If we defy Christ, we will not be able to fall back on our ministers and churches or on our own intuition and say that, because we were falsely led, that we are excused. Underscoring this, Jesus commanded, "Call no man on earth 'teacher' because you have only one Teacher: the Christ." (Mt.23:10). Because Jesus taught that baptism is vital to salvation, and because the apostles repeated this admonition emphatically, no theological argument to the contrary can have substance.

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**"You Must Repent,
and you Must be Baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ
For the Forgiveness of Your Sins"**
Acts 2:38