

Understanding the Christian Sacrament of Baptism: Perspectives of Some New Testament Personalities


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ABSTRACT

Baptism is a sacrament that Christ established before His ascension. It symbolizes His death and resurrection, representing the unity of the baptized person with Christ and their acceptance into the body of Christ. This paper explores baptism in the New Testament (NT) by focusing on some specific personalities. The study shows that water baptism, as an outward act, serves as a reminder and symbol of God's redeeming work through Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity. Consequently, baptism unites us with Christ and invites us to be part of the Christian community. The study concludes that baptism is not an optional extra, but a command from our Lord Jesus Christ to all generations of believers, regardless of denomination, tribe, race, culture, or ethnicity. The study uses published textbooks, electronic books, and journal articles as secondary sources to examine baptism in the NT.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to [Schaff \(1988\)](#), Augustine, a bishop of Hippo in North Africa during the fifth century, is known to have once said:

Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . has bound His people under the new dispensation together in fellowship by sacraments, which are in number very few, in observance most easy, and in significance most excellent, as baptism solemnized in the name of the Trinity, the communion of His body and blood... ([Schaff, 1988](#), p. 300).

Augustine suggests that Jesus Christ has united His followers through two specific sacraments, namely, baptism and communion. These sacraments are said to be few in number, easy to observe, and hold great importance in the Christian tradition. Therefore, Christians are to firmly adhere to this principle, which Christ has ordained for us as a "light yoke" and an "easy burden" ([Schaff, 1988](#), p. 300). Thus, these sacraments are not meant to be a heavy burden or a difficult task but as an invitation to an easier way of living meant to identify us with Christ and strengthen our faith in God.

The sacramental rite of baptism is the focus of this article. Christians of all traditions and denominations have consistently and universally observed this rite, except the Salvationists and Quakers, who reject all outward sacraments in their religious practices ([Bridge & Phypers, 1977](#), p. 7). They hold that the outward sacramental practice of the Christian faith is not necessary for the operation of the grace of God. Salvation, to them, is determined by the condition of a person's heart, and water baptism, observed in the apostolic age, was merely an emblem to distinguish the Church from Jews and Pagans during its inception ([Dabney, 1985](#), p. 758). Beyond the Salvationists and Quakers who do not believe in baptism as a means of grace, the subject, among those who believe, such as the Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal Christian movements, has generated much discussion and debate, resulting in conflicting interpretations. The research aims to explore the New Testament (NT) understanding of baptism by examining the perspectives of various NT figures.



1.1. Jewish Precedents to New Testament Baptism

Before Christianity, various forms of ritual purification existed, similar to baptism. For example, in the Old Testament, the practice of mikveh, involving immersion in a ritual bath to cleanse from ritual impurities was prevalent (Lev. 14:8–9, 15). Observant Jewish individuals immersed themselves in the mikveh waters to rid themselves of ritual impurities like bodily discharges (Lev. 15:2–24; 12:1–8), contact with a leper (Lev. 13; 14:9), or a dead body (Num. 5:2), which were considered detestable to God. The state of ritual impurity prevented individuals from certain areas of the Temple or performing religious ceremonies. Schürer (1979) avers, “In the priestly context, purity and impurity were mainly cultic. To enter the Temple, perform acts of worship, and partake of a sacrificial meal, the Jew had to be in a state of cleanness. If not, he was excluded from the sanctuary and its activities.” (p. 475) Purity was a prerequisite for participating in the religious practices and rituals of the Temple. Galen (2017) explains that immersion was a requirement for entering into the Temple’s ritual areas to offer sacrifice to God. It was believed that immersion cleansed individuals of impurities or sins, allowing them to approach God with a pure heart and a renewed spirit. The significance of water in the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests and in the cleanliness before ministering in the Most Holy Place is emphasized in the OT (Exod. 40:12, 31–32; Lev. 8:1–6, 16:3–4, 26–28; Isa. 1:16, Eze. 36:25ff, Ps. 51:2). According to Badia (1980), there were three different types of bodily washing, (1) immersion of the whole body, (2) immersion of the hands and feet, and (3) immersion of the hands only (p. 12). All these rituals form the basis for the Jewish mikveh laws. This ritual of purification was an essential part of the Jewish faith and formed the basis for the Jewish mikveh laws.

The practice of proselyte baptism which can be traced to Jewish purification rituals was widespread during the intertestamental period (Scobie, 1964, p. 96). Gentiles seeking to join the Jewish community were required to adhere to the demands of the law, which included circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice (Cruickshank, 1980, p. 402). It was believed that Jewish fathers entered the covenant at Sinai through circumcision (Josh. 5:5), immersion (Exod. 19:10), and sprinkling of blood, which were essential for participation in consecrated activities (Exod. 24:5, 8) (Ferguson, 2009, p. 76). Male converts accepted these requirements, underwent circumcision, and were then baptized after some time. Female converts did not need to undergo circumcision. The immersion process involved standing in water that covered the genitals, following instructions from the law, and then fully immersing oneself in water, culminating in a sacrifice offered before witnesses (Ferguson, 2009, p. 81). Following this process, the convert was regarded as a newly-born member of Abraham’s family and a true Israelite, signifying a change in status and a restoration from ritual uncleanness into the Jewish community.

During the middle of the second century BC, ritual immersion gained significant importance among devout Jewish sects. These sects, particularly the Qumran community where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, required individuals wishing to become members to repent of their sins and undergo a thorough washing. After examination by the overseer, the initiates were admitted into the community (Badia, 1980, pp. 15–18). Their position on baptism emphasized the necessity of personal holiness before ritual immersion. According to the Community Rule, the wicked “shall not enter the water... for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness” (IQS 5:13–14) (Vermees, 1977, p. 180). This meant that those who persisted in wickedness and rejected the community’s principles were not allowed entry into the community of God’s truth.

In summary, it is evident from the discussion that ritual purification was widely practiced among various Jewish sects before the New Testament era. This historical context offers important foundational evidence for the practice of Christian baptism. When early Christians baptized their converts, they were not introducing a completely new practice. Instead, they were repurposing a well-known rite from the ancient world of the first century for specifically Christian use. However, the Christian baptism introduced a more deeper spiritual significance to the rite. As will be seen later in the discussion, Christian baptism introduced the concept of being spiritually reborn or born again, cleansing of sin, the purification of the soul, and the believer’s identification with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. It also signifies the believer’s commitment to living a new life in Jesus Christ. In this way, baptism became more than just a ritualistic cleansing ceremony, but a deeply spiritual act of faith and dedication to our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. BAPTISM AND VARIOUS NEW TESTAMENT PERSONALITIES

This section surveys different individuals in the NT who discuss baptism, namely, (1) John the Baptist, (2) The Baptism of Jesus Christ, (3) Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles, (4) Baptism in Pauline Epistles, and (5) Baptism in Johannine Epistles.

2.1. *John the Baptist*

It is worth noting that the significance of baptism as a sacred ritual became more prominent with the appearance of John the Baptist during the time of Jesus. John was regarded as a prophet and preacher whose role was to pave the way for the Messiah and assure people of their forgiveness through God's mercy (Lk 1:76–79). Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, an event that holds great importance in the Christian faith. This act, not only displays Jesus' identification with humanity but also signifies the start of his ministry. John began his ministry by administering a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4). His message of repentance and the need to flee from the impending wrath (Mt. 3:5–8) was not just a call to partake in a religious ceremony. Instead, it underscored the transformative nature of baptism and the profound change it symbolized (Bass, 1987, p. 123). John's baptism, intended for repentance and the forgiveness of sins, became a significant aspect of Christian baptism. John's primary emphasis was on converting people away from sin (Dirksen, 1932, pp. 203–206). This conversion "does not primarily refer to a moral change from evil to righteous conduct but to a change in a man's relationship to God" (Beasley-Murray, 1986, p. 34). In essence, John's baptism marked the transformation of a person from a life of sin to a life dedicated to God and living with a strong commitment to personal holiness. John's baptism caught enough attention that the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (1835), writing fifty years later in his eighteenth book of the Antiquities of the Jews, wrote:

Some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment for what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing (with water) would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not . . . the putting away (or the remission) of some sins (only), but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. . . . (Josephus, translated by Whiston, 1835, p. 611).

Josephus' statement reflects the sentiments of some Jewish individuals regarding the destruction of Herod Antipas' army and their interpretation of divine punishment. For him, these Jews believed that the army's destruction was a punishment from God for the unjust killing of John the Baptist, whom they considered a righteous and good man who preached and advocated for righteousness between people and piety towards God. He says that John the Baptist also encouraged the practice of baptism as a means of bodily purification while emphasizing that true purification of the soul should come through righteousness before the body could be purified through baptism. John acknowledged that his baptism with water signified repentance and forgiveness. However, he prophesied that Christ would administer a more profound baptism involving the Holy Spirit and fire in the future (Mt. 3:11–12; 3:17) (Beasley-Murray, 1986, p. 37). This emphasizes that John's baptism was preliminary and incomplete, serving as a preparation for Jesus' baptism of the Spirit and fire, which signifies immersion in the life of the Holy Spirit. According to Dunn (2010), this baptism of Spirit and fire would impact everyone, whether repentant or unrepentant, burning and consuming (p. 10). In Jewish eschatology, fire represents not only the destruction of the wicked but also the purification of the righteous (Dunn, 2010, p. 12). Just as Malachi speaks of refining fire (3:2–3) and destructive fire (4:1), it's possible that John, with his Jewish background, understood the Messianic baptism as both refining and destructive. This fiery Spirit immersion would burn up all impurity, representing destruction for the unrepentant and purification leading to redemption for the repentant, allowing entry into the blessings of the new age (Dunn, 2010, pp. 13–14).

The core of John the Baptist's message was that the Messianic Kingdom was on the horizon and that God's wrath was imminent (Mt. 3:7). thus, he urged people to repent and be baptized. He stressed that simply having a Jewish heritage was not enough to ensure a close connection with God. He cautioned against relying solely on being descendants of Abraham, emphasizing that true connection with God required producing genuine repentance (Mt. 3:8–9) (Dockery, 1992, p. 57). Furthermore, John proclaimed that the axe was already poised at the root of the tree (Mt. 3:10), invoking Isaiah's image of judgment against the unrepentant (Isa. 6) (Bridge & Phypers, 1977, p. 16). Nettles (2007), with this in mind, notes, "John's ministry represented a departure from the flesh . . . and announces that salvation is only possible through the forgiveness of sins because of the tender mercy of God and the purifying work of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11–12)" (p. 27). Beasley-Murray (1986) then puts forward that John's message and baptism had two focal points: "the eschatological dimension and its integration with repentance" (p. 32). Beasley-Murray appears to be saying that John's message and baptism focused on the end times or the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for humanity. As indicated earlier, John preached about the coming of the Messiah and the imminent judgment. Hence, the need for people to prepare themselves for the arrival of the Messiah and the establishment of God's kingdom. This affirms Tertullian's observation on John's baptism as indicated by Thelwall (1885):

The baptism announced by John formed the subject, even at the time, of a question, proposed by the Lord Himself indeed to the Pharisees, whether that baptism were heavenly, or truly earthly: about which they were unable to give a consistent answer, inasmuch as they understood not, because they believed not. But we, with but as poor a measure of understanding as of faith, are able to determine that that baptism was divine indeed, (yet in respect of the command, not in respect of efficacy too, in that we read that John was sent by the Lord to perform this duty,) but human in its nature: for it conveyed nothing celestial, but it fore-ministered to things celestial; being, to wit, appointed over repentance, which is in man's power . . . Accordingly, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find that men who had "John's baptism" had not received the Holy Spirit, whom they knew not even by hearing . . . for in that John used to preach "baptism for the remission of sins," the declaration was made with reference to a future remission; if it be true, (as it is,) that repentance is antecedent, remission subsequent; and this is "preparing the way." But he who "prepares" does not himself "perfect," but procures for another to perfect. John himself professes that the celestial things are not his, but Christ's by saying, "He who is from the earth speaketh concerning the earth; He who comes from the realms above is above all;" and again, by saying that he "baptized in repentance only, but that One would shortly come who would baptize in the Spirit and fire;" – of course because true and stable faith is baptized with water, unto salvation; pretended and weak faith is baptized with fire, unto judgment (Robert *et al.*, 1989, pp. 673–674).

Tertullian's observation provides a profound theological interpretation of the significance of John the Baptist's baptism. It posits that the Pharisees, when questioned by the Lord, could not provide a consistent answer regarding the heavenly or earthly nature of John's baptism due to their lack of understanding and belief. The observation further contends that despite our limited understanding and faith, we can discern that John's baptism had both divine and human dimensions. It underscores that John's baptism was intrinsically linked to repentance, serving as a precursor for celestial matters. However, it is emphasized that individuals who received "John's baptism" did not receive the Holy Spirit, indicating its insufficiency for complete spiritual transformation. Tertullian's observation also delves into the concept that John's role was to pave the way for someone else to fulfill the divine plan and that the celestial matters belonged to Christ. His baptism was described as being for repentance, while a future baptism, performed by Christ, would be in the Spirit and fire. In summary, Tertullian sheds light on the nature and purpose of John's baptism, highlighting its role in preparing for the arrival of Christ and distinguishing between genuine and weak faith.

Lampe and Paton (1960) assert that John's Baptism had a singular aim: "To gather the Messianic people, 'to make ready for the Lord a people'" (p. 51). Accordingly, John's baptism held profound meaning and purpose in the context of the impending Messiah. It served as a ritual through which the baptized individuals were incorporated into the new Messianic community of God. Thus, by administering baptism, John aimed to establish a community of individuals who were spiritually primed to receive the message of the Messiah upon his arrival. This baptism was viewed as a pivotal step toward the coming of the Lord and the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies.

2.2. *Jesus Christ*

Jesus Christ began His public ministry on earth by willingly submitting Himself to the baptism of John in the Jordan River (Jn. 3:13). The question that arises is why Jesus, who was sinless, chose to go through a baptism of repentance. In response to John's hesitation, Jesus provided a clue as to why he sought John's baptism: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). Some early Church fathers have explained that Jesus' baptism served the purpose of purifying humanity rather than atoning for his sins. For example, Justin Martyr has this to say about the baptism of Jesus:

Now, we know that He did not go to the river because He stood in need of baptism, or of the descent of the Spirit like a dove; even as He submitted to be born and to be crucified, not because He needed such things, but because of the human race, which from Adam had fallen under the power of death and the guile of the serpent, and each one of which had committed personal transgression (Martyr, 1939, as cited in Robert *et al.*, 1989, p. 243).

Justin discusses the reasons behind Jesus' actions, such as His baptism and crucifixion, suggesting that Jesus voluntarily underwent these events for the benefit of humanity. According to Justin, the human race, burdened by sin and death since Adam's fall, required Jesus' birth, crucifixion, and other acts of redemption to restore the relationship between God and humanity. Justin highlights that Jesus' actions were motivated by love and the desire to deliver humanity from its spiritual predicament. Therefore, Jesus' baptism was not a result of His sin, but a manifestation of His identification with sinful humanity, signifying His purpose and affirming the process of redemption. Young (1995) writes, "In His identity with the totality of human need, He submitted to baptism in order to affirm the process of redemption which was in action as a result of John's prophetic career" (p. 17). Wilkins (2004)

also suggests that Jesus identified Himself with sinful humanity during his baptism. This serves as a representation of His purpose, as well as to establish a public link and continuity between John's message and His ministry and to endorse the rite of baptism among Christians of all generations (p. 140). [Aquinas, 1971](#) makes a thought-provoking point about the necessity of Christ being baptized by John. He states:

... First, it was necessary for Christ to be baptized by John, in order that He might sanctify baptism; ... Secondly, that Christ might be manifested. Whence John himself says (Jn 1:31): "That He," i.e., Christ, "may be made manifest in Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" ([Aquinas, 1971](#), p. 4034).

Aquinas states two main reasons for Jesus' baptism by John. First, to "sanctify baptism", bestowing it with a divine significance. In other words, Christ set an example for future believers to follow. Second, Christ's baptism was crucial for his manifestation to the people of Israel. John the Baptist, recognizing the mission of Christ, declares that his purpose in baptizing with water is to prepare the way for the manifestation of the Messiah. Through baptism, Christ openly revealed himself to the people and sets in motion his ministry, ultimately leading to his crucifixion and resurrection. Aquinas's perspective underscores the theological significance of Christ's baptism, emphasizing its dual purposes: the sanctification of the sacrament and the manifestation of Christ to the people. This interpretation invites us to contemplate the profound symbolism and spiritual realities embodied in this important event in Christian history. In Luke 12:50, Jesus uses baptism metaphorically to refer to the vicarious suffering He must undergo. This is to say that Jesus' baptism was a symbolic act that was in preparation for what he was to experience on the cross. His baptism was essentially the start of his journey to the cross. [Green \(1988\)](#) explains that Jesus' cross became His baptism, making the justification of the ungodly possible by dealing with the sins of the world (pp. 39, 43). This suggests that the crux of baptism can only be understood in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. "John's baptism of Jesus, therefore, links the act of water baptism with the meaning of the salvation events through His own person and work" ([Bass, 1987](#), p. 124).

In the baptism of Jesus, all three persons of the Holy Trinity were present. During this significant event, Christ, in his human form, received the Father's voice and the Holy Spirit descended on you (Luke 3:21–22). The baptism marked the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, affirming his status as the Son and servant of the Lord and his call to the messianic vocation ([Green, 1988](#), pp. 40–42). Jesus' baptism also symbolized his solidarity with sinners and foreshadowed his role as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 42:1) leading to his passion, death, and resurrection ([Lampe & Paton, 1960](#), p. 53). According to Justin Martyr, the Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus, filling Him with all powers and gifts, signifying the end of the era of prophets in ancient Israel. He also stated that John's baptism of Jesus marked the transition from the old dispensation to the availability of gifts to Christians after Jesus' ascension to heaven. This made the gifts of the Holy Spirit accessible to believers across all demographics ([Robert et al., 1989](#), p. 243).

During His ministry, Jesus shared a message that echoed that of John the Baptist, urging people to "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15). His act of being baptized served as an inspiration for others, and especially His disciples, to follow in His example. He permitted His followers to accept a rite that He had experienced and gave His disciples authority to administer baptism. Although the practice of baptism during Jesus' public ministry is not explicitly mentioned in the first three Gospels, the Gospel of John presents a tradition in which Jesus or His disciples are depicted as carrying out baptisms at the beginning of His public ministry in Judea (Jn 3:22–23, 4:1–2). Therefore, the authority of Christian baptism is rooted in Jesus' command "to baptize", His submission to baptism at the start of His messianic ministry, and its development and practice by the early Christians. Hence, it is vital for Christians today to duly obey and practice baptism as a divine grace.

2.3. *Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles*

In the book of Acts, baptism was a central practice in the early Church, right after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 41). It was a crucial part of the process of becoming a Christian and a member of the early Church (Acts 2:21, 41; 22:16). The earliest Christians regarded baptism as a "Sacrament of the Gospel" ([Flemington, 1948](#), pp. 50, 124), meaning that it was a physical expression of the essence of the gospel, a manifestation of the heart of the gospel.

In the early Christian community, baptism was tied to repentance, the remission of sins, and admission into the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:38, 42–47; 8:12ff; 16:14–15; 22:16ff). It served as a visible declaration of one's dedication to follow Christ and an outward manifestation of internal faith. Baptism was also associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit, signifying the ability to "speak in tongues". On the day of Pentecost, the long-awaited messianic Spirit was poured out upon the messianic Israel, fulfilling Jesus' pledge and confirming His messianic authority (Acts 2:33–36). Peter

encouraged his audience to repent, be baptized, receive forgiveness for their sins, and embrace the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Since Pentecost, the same messianic Spirit indwelt the Church. It appears that most, if not all, individuals baptized in the early Church received the Holy Spirit's gifts after the apostles' laying on of hands (Acts 8:16–17, 19; 9:17–18; 19:5–6). The only exceptions were Cornelius and his household, and Paul, who received the Spirit's gift before baptism (Acts 10:48; 9:17, 18). The early Church administered the rite of baptism to those who heard and accepted the message (Acts 2:41) and demonstrated genuine repentance from sin and unbelief, expressing their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12, 35–38).

Baptism in the early Christian Church was always administered “in the name of Jesus Christ” or “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). This phrase had theological and ritual significance in the early Church as it set Christian baptism apart from Jewish and pagan purification rituals. It also symbolized being baptized on behalf of, or under the authority of, Jesus Christ. According to Dunn, “in the name of” signifies two things. First, “the . . . baptized saw himself as standing in the place of Christ Himself and acts on His behalf.” Second, “the baptismal candidate saw his baptism as his act of commitment to discipleship of Jesus” (Dunn, 1986, p. 173). The phrase could also symbolize a declaration of faith in Christ and a form of prayer. The candidate confessed the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 22:16), and prayer was offered for acceptance and salvation from God on behalf of the baptized. Beasley-Murray suggests that it's also possible that the baptizer called the name of Jesus over the candidate. Through this, the baptized individual was dedicated to the Lord (Beasley-Murray, 1986, pp. 100–102) and received the blessings of the Kingdom. In Paul's baptism, his sins were considered as being washed away. The forgiveness of sins was also accomplished through calling on the name of Jesus, as mentioned in Acts 22:16. This indicates that sins were cleansed by invoking the Lord's name during baptism. Paul reiterates the same concept in Romans 10:13: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This reflects a sincere sentiment rooted in the understanding that Christ's sacrifice was essential for one's salvation. Martin (1974) states, “Baptism was an act of submission to His authority, obedience to His will, and a deliberate dedication to His service and Lordship” (p. 99). Therefore, baptism essentially, was and still is an act of entering into the ownership of Christ, becoming children and heirs to His promises.

Overall, baptism in the Acts of the Apostles is presented as an essential part of the Christian faith, marking the beginning of a believer's journey in the community of believers and their commitment to living out their faith in Christ. It serves as a symbol of cleansing, forgiveness, and new life in Christ.

2.4. *Baptism in the Pauline Epistles*

In Pauline theology, baptism can be discussed in three different categories. First, baptism symbolizes the union of believers and their incorporation into the body of Christ. According to Paul, Christ's death and resurrection are seen as a single act through which God redeemed mankind. Paul uses immersion in baptism to represent the believer's dying and rising with Christ. He says, “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death . . . , just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . , we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:3–4). Similarly, Galatians 3:27 states, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Again, Paul states, “having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him . . . ” (Col. 2:12). Dunn (1986) notes the close correlation between Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 and remarks that both passages “. . . speak of baptism as a means of and instrument to being buried with Christ, or as the context in which the would-be Christian was buried with Christ. Paul is here evoking the powerful symbolism of baptism (probably by immersion) as a burying (out of sight) of the old life” (p. 173). According to Beasley-Murray (1986), Paul's statement, “We were buried with Him through baptism to death” means that:

We are laid in the grave of Christ. To be buried with Him in a Jerusalem grave about AD 30 means that our death as believers is the death that He died on the cross on Calvary. Consequently, the death and resurrection of the baptized man is the death and resurrection that he suffered in the Christ who died and rose as his representative. The death and resurrection are his because he has become united with Christ. This is the primary meaning of Paul's concept of baptism as dying and rising with Christ (Beasley-Murray, 1986, pp. 133, 134).

Thus, when believers are baptized, they become united with or part of Christ, and the death and resurrection they experience is, in a sense, the same death and resurrection that Jesus experienced. In other words, believers can share in the death and resurrection of Jesus as if they had suffered through it themselves. Murray (1968) explains that “If baptism signifies union with Christ, it must mean union with him in all that he is and in all phases of his work as the Mediator” (p. 214). Thus, when we die to sin as part of our baptism, it signifies our union with Christ in His death on the cross. The intimate nature of our union with Christ through baptism is compared to that of a married couple through sexual intercourse (Green, 1988, p. 48). This shows how deep and meaningful our spiritual connection

to Christ is. Again, for [Beasley-Murray \(1986\)](#), Paul's connection between baptism and Christ's death and resurrection "stresses the ethical nature of baptism as a 'dying' to sinful passions and conduct by the renunciation of self and a 'rising' to a new life for the glory of God by the grace of the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 6:6–14)" (p. 132). To put it differently, baptism is a symbol of dying to our old, sinful behavior and rising with a new life that is focused on glorifying God and living by the Spirit of Christ. [Barth \(1976\)](#) seems to express the same view thus, "In the Pauline letters, references regarding baptism are in ethical contexts. Decisive elements of the life and conduct in faith are structured after the model of baptism" (p. 88). In other words, Paul uses the concept of baptism as an ethical framework for faith and how people should live their lives. Thus, it may be said that in Paul's thought, baptism covers all that Christianity means: dying to sin and rising again to a new moral life. It places the baptized in a sphere of godly life in which sin is subjugated. Hence, "a Christian who continually lives in sin might have completely forgotten the meaning or significance of his baptism" ([Flemington, 1948](#), p. 59). The believer in a sense, is to have a negative response to sin and make an effort to live according to Christ's precepts.

Second, Paul regards baptism as an act that takes place through the agency of the Spirit. It is through baptism that the Spirit is received by believers (1 Cor. 6:11–13; Eph 1:13; Gal 3:2; and Rom. 8:5). [Beasley-Murray \(1986\)](#) affirms that "baptism is what it is through the operation of Christ by His Spirit . . ." (p. 280). In essence, when a person is baptized, it is believed that they are given a rebirth into the faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, working through Jesus Christ. So, baptism in the name of Christ is baptism in the Spirit. Paul considers the baptized believers to belong to the *soma Christou* (the body of Christ) by the power of His indwelling spirit. Paul asserts, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . ." (1 Cor. 12:13). Paul suggests that baptism unites believers into one body, the Church. This unity of the Church is the result of the one Spirit, which is received through faith in baptism (Gal. 3:26; Col. 2:12; Eph 1:13). It puts an end to all human divisions based on race or class in the Church (Gal. 3:27–28; cf, 1 Cor. 12:13). Thus, in baptism, we see the identification of a body of people with one person in baptism. The gift of the Spirit in Paul's teaching on baptism can be understood in eschatological terms. For Paul, the gift of the Holy Spirit guarantees an even greater future gift. The term "sealed" in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and Ephesians 4:30 may indirectly refer to baptism. Paul seems to be reminding his readers that baptism points towards a complete redemption that is still to come. It is important to note that in Paul's thought, the Holy Spirit is not a human spirit or disposition towards holiness, but the Spirit of Christ within a believer that brings about the spiritual transformation. [Bass \(1987\)](#) affirms this understanding thus:

Through Spirit baptism, the redeemed sinner is incorporated into the spiritual body of Christ, not merely an act of initiation but as a state or condition of personal righteousness. It is, therefore, the only access to identification with the redeeming Christ ([Bass, 1987](#), p. 124).

Bass emphasizes that "through Spirit baptism, the redeemed sinner" becomes part of the "spiritual body of Christ," indicating a profound union with Christ beyond a mere initiation. Bass' statement also suggests that this union with Christ is not just a one-time event but "a state or condition of personal righteousness." So, it can be deduced that Spirit baptism is the primary means by which believers can truly identify with and participate in the redeeming work of Christ. This understanding underscores the importance of spiritual cleansing and empowerment, which is believed to come with Spirit baptism.

Third, baptism, in Paul's letters, symbolizes cleansing or washing away one's sins. Ananias first spoke of the idea of washing away sin to Paul after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, where he was told to ". . . Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away . . ." (Acts 22:16) after three days of fasting. Paul later adopted this concept of cleansing in his understanding of baptism. To Paul, baptism is a form of regeneration that purifies and saves us through the blood of Christ. He says, ". . . you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Similarly, Titus 3:3–7 states, ". . . He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit . . ." The phrase "washing of rebirth" refers to the believer's conversion experience when they were baptized and received the Holy Spirit.

It is also probable that the references to the "washing of rebirth" and the "renewal by the Holy Spirit" both refer to the Spirit's work of cleansing and providing spiritual regeneration in the lives of the believers. The sins which separate us from God are washed away by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the sacramental effect of the water. Paul says in Ephesians that the Love and the self-offering of Christ give baptism its power to cleanse and sanctify the Church (Eph. 5:25–27, cf. 5:2).

In summary, St. Paul presents baptism as the saving act and event of the gospel, portraying the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Paul stresses that the Spirit received at baptism is intended for moral renewal and oneness of the Church. He shows that baptism is God's act which demands human response. What God has done in the Gospel and does in baptism requires our response of faith (Col. 2:12) through the grace of God (Eph. 2:8).

2.5. *Baptism in Johannine Epistles*

In the Gospel of John 3:3–5, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that a person cannot enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. This passage is often understood to the significance of Christian baptism, symbolizing rebirth through water and the Spirit. The union of Water and Spirit is associated with the redemptive work of Christ. The focal point of this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is the essential nature of spiritual rebirth as a prerequisite for entering Gods kingdom. [Flemington \(1948\)](#) observes that the rite of water-baptism united with the activity of the Spirit is regarded as the means whereby the Christian is born from above.” (p. 87). The water is not just a conduit for the Spirit, but offers the necessary purification to enable the Spirit to dwell within the baptized believer.

In John 3:5, baptism symbolizes the believer’s regeneration through the work of the Holy Spirit. This act signifies the spiritual birth that qualifies the believer as a “child of God” and grants access to the Kingdom of God. The necessity of Christ’s death and resurrection is deeply intertwined with Christian baptism, as evidenced in John 3:5 and the Apostolic teaching on baptism. This unique baptism combines the symbolic act of baptism with the actual moment of receiving the Spirit. John emphasizes that the new birth through the Spirit is made possible by faith in baptism. Those who experience this spiritual rebirth are called “children of God” ([Flemington, 1948](#), pp. 87–88, 231). The connection between “baptism” and “Spirit” in John reflects a concept rooted in the teachings of Paul and in Jesus’ own baptism when He was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

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John affirms the necessity of the Christian belief in Christ as the Son of God and defines this belief more precisely concerning the form of heresy prevalent at the time (1 Jn. 5:5–8). John’s statement, “This is He who came by water and blood,” corrects the false teacher Cerinthus, who claimed that Jesus came only through water. John believes the Spirit was present with Jesus at His baptism and death. [Flemington \(1948\)](#) states, “Christ was as truly present in Jesus at the Crucifixion as at the baptism” (p. 88). Water and blood have been interpreted to represent “the baptism of Jesus and His death on the cross” ([Beasley-Murray, 1986](#), p. 237). Therefore, Jesus Christ was baptized in flesh and blood and died in flesh and blood, confirming the reality of His incarnation.

3. CONCLUSION

In considering the question of the origin of water baptism, it has been revealed that baptism was a ritual that involved self-immersion and washing in biblical and ancient Judaism. The study has shown that John the Baptist preached and baptized people. His baptism was understood to allow individuals to repent of their sins and turn towards God. Also, it was noticed that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill all righteousness, and thus, he commanded his disciples to baptize all nations. In the Acts of the Apostles, baptism is an important event in a believer’s life as it symbolizes the reception of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing of sins. Again, our study has shown that baptism derives its sense from Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and the response of those who hear and believe the message of salvation. It is an outward act of obedience to the inward attitude of repentance and faith through which the power of the Holy Spirit imparts the gift of regeneration. Baptism, therefore, is symbolized by the dying and rising with Christ by which the baptized is united with Christ. Thus, the baptized die to sin and rise with Christ, becoming alive to God (Rom. 6:11) and no longer living under the control of sin (Rom. 6:6, 9, 14). This change that occurs in the baptized life is known as “born from above” or “born anew” (Jn 3; 1 Pet. 1:3). The born-again person then becomes attached to the body of Christ where he or she is taught the precepts of God.

Paul’s connection of baptism with faith in the work of God demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ and the raising of believers to new life is seen in an eschatological context. The “moral renewal” resulting from baptism refers to the future life where believers will be clothed with heavenly habitation. Our union with Christ assures us that we will rise with Him on the last day, share with Him all the privileges of His kingdom, and reign with him eternally. In brief, our entire salvation was achieved through Christ’s death and resurrection. Through baptism, we have been granted access to the full

extent of this salvation. But, we have yet to experience the complete benefits of this saving work in the future. Baptism, therefore, is not an optional activity but a command given by Jesus Christ to all believers, irrespective of one's denomination, tribe, race, culture, and ethnicity. It signifies the union of believers with Christ and their inclusion into the body of Christ. Therefore, it can be concluded that baptism is an essential Christian practice for all generations of believers.

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