

Rom 6:3-4 - What Kind of Baptism?

Romans Series (Part 9)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Dec 29, 2013

Opening Remarks:

- A. Welcome to another study of the biblical book of Romans from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we discussed the meaning of the two phrases "*since the creation of the world*" and "*what has been made*" as they are used in Romans 1:20. We saw how they are not talking about the creation of the nation of Israel at the Exodus, as some of our fellow-preterists have suggested, but rather are referring to the creation of the "heavens and earth" as described by Moses in Genesis 1-3.
- C. This time, as promised, we will be looking at the subject of baptism as it is dealt with in Romans 6:3-4. Many preterists have tossed baptism aside as a relic of the past. But I believe that is throwing baptism out with the bath water (i.e., throwing the good out with the bad)! As we will see in this lesson, there is a definite place for water baptism in the Church today after the Eternal Kingdom arrived in AD 70.
- D. Before we get started, let's ask God's blessing on our study:

Our Holy God, perfect, pure, and righteous in all Your ways: We praise You for all that You are, and for all you have done to save us and sanctify us for Your service. May Your Holy Spirit teach us and guide us and illuminate your Word in our hearts as we prayerfully study it. We only want to know the truth and follow it with all our hearts. Keep our feet on the narrow pathway of Your truth. Help us discern your truth so that we can turn away from error and deception. Help us to properly apply it to us today, so that it will purify and sanctify our lives to serve you faithfully. We pray in the Name of our precious Savior and Lord Jesus. Amen.

What Kind of Baptism is Rom. 6:3-4 Talking About?

Tom Holland's Interpretation of Baptism in Rom 6:3-4

Since several of the Collective Body advocates are using the arguments in Tom Holland's book to support their collective body interpretation of Romans 5-11, I thought it might be appropriate for us to interact with Holland's book here on the podcast [*Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings*, pub. by Mentor in Scotland, 2004].

This week I read the three chapters (3, 5, 7) in his book which have the most relevance to our study of Romans chapter six, plus skimmed through the rest of the book looking up his specific treatment of Romans 6 and baptism as listed in the Scripture and Subject Indices.

It is interesting that Tom Holland was very much aware of John A. T. Robinson's book on *The Body*, but only used a few parts of Robinson's material to build his collective body paradigm. He clearly pointed out that he unequivocally rejected the sacramental literalism and universalism of Robinson. I had forgotten that John A. T. Robinson was a Universalist. Perhaps that helps explain why Max and Tim King's publishing company (Bimillennial Press) reprinted Robinson's book on *The Body*. They must see Robinson's collective body view as supportive of their Universalism. I remember seeing Robinson's book on the shelf in Max's office many years ago when he was writing his big book on the resurrection, and when I asked him about it, he told me that Robinson's book had been a major influence on his development of the collective body concept. It is no surprise, therefore, to see that Max has now followed Robinson into universalism.

There are many problems with Tom Holland's explanation of Romans 6, however it is not the collective body typological framework that is the problem. It is the extreme way he applies that framework to Paul's soteriology and eschatology that puts him into conflict with not only Paul's theology, but with the rest of the New Testament as well. For Holland, the collective body motif is everything. In every soteriological and eschatological text he finds a collective body application just waiting for him to share it with the world. It is the driving force behind his current research and writing, just as it was for Max King and all the other collective body advocates.

Tom Holland is a Reformed Evangelical theologian from Wales. He appears to be very much in agreement with Reformed (a.k.a. Calvinist) covenant theology. I suspect many of the Church of Christ preterists would not be comfortable with his Calvinist covenant theology, nor with his **non-immersion mode of baptism**.

What we also need to remember here is that Tom Holland does not agree with the preterist view, nor are there any preterists who agree with every aspect of his collective body view and how he applies it to sacramentology, ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. None of the collective body preterists who use Holland agree with him on everything. They all pick and choose what parts of Holland they want to use. I suspect that would be somewhat disturbing to Holland to see how some preterists are using his collective body paradigm to support their preterist collective body resurrection view.

Holland claims to be a conservative evangelical Presbyterian who is Reformed in his soteriology. He teaches at the *Wales Evangelical School of Theology* which is located in Bryntirion in Bridgend, South Wales (United Kingdom). One of the Internet reviewers (Guy Davies, July 2006) of Holland's book had this to say: (boldface added)

... **Holland takes his case too far** by arguing that the great Servant Song in Isaiah 53 was not used by the apostles to interpret the death of Christ. Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:7-8 and Acts 8:32-35 would suggest otherwise.

Holland's key idea is that Paul's thinking was radically shaped by Old Testament teaching on new exodus and the Passover. Accordingly, Christ's work on the cross is understood as a Passover sacrifice that accomplishes the "new exodus"; the redemption of the world

from the power of sin, death and Satan. The writer detects the influence of Ezekiel's vision of the new temple on Paul's view of the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice. Ezekiel's apparent conflation of the Passover with the Day of Atonement is claimed to be the source of Paul's teaching in Romans 3:25-26.

A recurring theme in this book is that **interpreters have tended to view Paul through the lenses of Western individualism**. Holland tries to redress the balance by insisting that **the 'body of sin' in Romans 6:6 should be understood corporately** as humanity under the power of sin and the Devil. He also tries to argue that **baptism in Romans 6 and the 'harlot' of 1 Corinthians 6:15ff are corporate categories. I did not find Holland's exegesis altogether convincing**. There is certainly a corporate dimension to Paul's thought (Romans 5:12ff, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 etc). It would have been better if the author had spent more time unpacking these passages rather than trying to establish a corporate meaning of texts that are **better understood on an individual or personal level**.

Holland sees justification as God's declaration that he has taken his people into a covenant relationship with himself. Contrary to Wright, justification does not simply act as a boundary marker, denoting those who are in covenant. Justification brings the people of God into the covenant. **Justification is a corporate category. God justifies his covenant people rather than individuals**. Christians appropriate this justification personally when they believe in Christ. Holland maintains the Reformer's insight into justification as a forensic declaration that sinners have been put right with God apart from their works. But he insists that **justification is also relational** - because it refers to the creation of a covenant between the Lord and his people. An appendix on *The Reformed Faith and Justification* discusses this matter further. **The downplaying of the individual aspect of justification by faith in Holland's treatment is to be regretted. Paul is capable of describing justification in deeply personal language** (Galatians 2:16 & 20).

The Contours of Pauline Theology is a helpful exploration of the Old Testament roots of the apostle's theology. Holland succeeds in demonstrating that Paul was a true Hebrew Christian and no Hellenist. **He exposes some of the flaws in 'New Perspective' thinking**. His own proposals on justification demand careful thought and attention, but **many will find his emphasis on corporate justification hard to swallow**. As has been suggested, the author sometimes over-eggs his pudding by **taking his arguments too far**. Holland does not have the literary flair of Tom Wright (few do!) and the book sometimes lacks verve and clarity. But this work is the fruit of much study and reflection. It should be read by all who wish to keep abreast of the ever challenging and stimulating field of Pauline Theology. [Found on the following site on Dec 28, 2013:
<http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.com/2006/07/contours-of-pauline-theology-by-tom.html>]

[Side note from Ed: *This "downplaying of the individual aspect of justification" is a major weakness of the Collective Body View. It leads people astray into thinking that there is no longer any individual responsibility or accountability, and thus they are individually free to live however they want, as long as the collective body (the church) is not affected. That is antinomianism and libertinism of the individual. This overemphasis on the collective body and the downplaying of the individual aspect also leads to universalism. We have seen a lot of the bad fruit of the **COLLECTIVE** Body View in our past studies, but these comments from Guy Davies remind us once again why it is so dangerous morally, ethically and spiritually. It tends to downplay any **INDIVIDUAL***

*responsibility and accountability in the moral, ethical, and spiritual arenas. We do not hear many exhortations to individual sanctification, character development, practice of the virtues, expressing true agape love, or serving our fellow man, coming from the Collective Body advocates. Instead, we see a lot of bad moral, ethical, and spiritual fruit coming from their teaching. This does not mean that we should throw the whole Collective Body concept out with the bath water. But it does mean that we need to be **balanced** in the way we apply both the Individual and Collective concepts to the various soteriological and eschatological texts. If either of the Individual or Collective views tend to downplay or negate the development of personal sanctification, then we need to take a second look at that view. And that is what Guy Davies is suggesting here. He is hoisting a yellow caution flag into the discussion, warning us that the extreme Collective Body approach of Tom Holland and others can lead to moral, ethical, and spiritual disaster if it downplays individual responsibility, accountability, and sanctification.]*

An example of Tom Holland's "taking his arguments too far" is his treatment of **baptism** here in Romans chapter six. By redefining baptism as a collective body event at the Cross, it takes away all the motivation of the individual to be baptized. As we will see here in our studies of Romans 6:3-4, Paul stresses the significance of water baptism for individual sanctification. It is a public confession of our faith in Christ, and a visible sign of our covenant with God to "die to sin" and "bury" the past sinful lifestyle and from then onwards to live in sanctification. The collective body application of baptism here in this context totally strips away all the moral, ethical, and spiritual exhortations that Paul is laboring to set forth here in this text. Paul is at pains to show that when we were baptized we "died to" our old sinful worldly lifestyle, and that we made a covenant with God not to continue living that way, but to grow toward sanctification.

Note also that I am not denying or rejecting the *concept* of the collective body (the church). Instead, I embrace it as a true biblical concept. My only concern is how and where we apply that concept in the Biblical text. And this is where all the differences between the **Collective Body View** and the **Individual Body View** show up. The advocates for the Collective Body View tend to see all the eschatological resurrection texts as collective, while the Individual Body guys tend to see the eschatological resurrection as a group of individual saints being raised out of Hades at the same time. The whole group is raised at the same time, but the group is not referred to as a single body. It is instead a resurrection of the dead ones (plural), NOT the resurrection of the dead one (singular). Significant difference. But this is where the difference between the two views is most clearly found -- in the way each view interprets the various resurrection texts.

Both views believe in the concept of a collective body, but we do not apply that concept the same way in the various resurrection texts. And both views believe there are individuals that make up the collective body, but we differ on how those individuals are treated in the various resurrection texts.

So it all boils down to how we interpret the individual resurrection texts. The Collective Body guys tend to force-fit the collective body concept into all the resurrection texts,

regardless of whether it is actually there or not, while the Individual Body advocates tend to interpret each text individually unless there is something in the context which necessitates a collective body application.

And that is my complaint with Tom Holland, regarding his interpretation of baptism here in Romans 6:3-4. He tends to see the collective body concept under every rock and behind every tree. He assumes it is there in every text. He feels no burden to prove that it is there, but rather only to explain how he sees it there.

In regard to Rom. 6:3-4, Holland rejects the idea of water baptism being involved here, because "water baptism inevitably imposes individualism" into the context and nullifies a collective body interpretation (*Contours*, 149). Therefore, since he believes the Romans 6 context is totally collective in its application, the baptism that is mentioned in this context cannot be water baptism. Instead, he insists that it has to be some kind of baptism that will harmonize with his collective body concept that he assumes is there. That is circular reasoning. He first needs to prove that the collective body is actually there in the context, before twisting the meaning of baptism to fit his assumptions and presuppositions.

Here is his concept of "**corporate baptism**" that he believes Rom 6:3-4 and several other similar verses are talking about (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 5:27; Eph 4:5; Gal 3:27; et al):

"...baptism is not a reference to water, but to the one great event in which the Spirit made the Lord one with his people in the event of his vicarious atoning death..." (*Contours*, 148).

"...[this] problem is overcome once it is realised that alongside the baptism into Christ is the type of the baptism of the Israelites into Moses in their Exodus. ... As Moses, in the Exodus from Egypt, took out the people of God, for they were united with him through baptism [in the Red Sea], so Christ takes those who have been baptised into union with him from the realm of Sin and death. This baptism into Christ took place in his Exodus (Luke 9:31) [at the Cross], in his coming out of the realm of Sin and death. It was a baptism into his death that all believers [as a collective body] experienced, in the same historic moment [when Christ died on the Cross]." (*Contours*, 151) [bracketed info added to clarify his meaning]

"It was this baptism that brought the covenant community into existence. Therefore if one asks when did the church historically come into existence, the answer is at the moment of Christ's death, for it was then that the Spirit baptised all members of the covenant community into union with their Lord and Saviour. ... From then on, in terms of ultimate reality, no believer could experience anything apart from all other believers, for their union with Christ is such that all other believers are also partakers in Christ's saving work." (*Contours*, 151)

"What I am arguing for is that the baptism passages which we have considered [Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 5:27; Eph 4:5; Gal 3:27; et al] are speaking neither about water baptism nor even of Christ's baptism into his sufferings, even though these are important related themes, but about a baptism... [in which] believers have shared in the death of Christ [on the Cross]." (*Contours*, 151-152)

"...the Jewish material did not look for a suffering Messiah whose death would bring about the salvation of the new covenant community. Paul saw the death of Jesus to be his exodus and identified the moment of the birth of the community under its new representative to be in the moment of its Messiah's death. Thus all Christians have been baptised into his death. To be outside of that ... is to be outside of Christ." (*Contours*, 154)

There are two additional reasons why Tom Holland is predisposed to reject the idea of water baptism here in Rom 6:3-4. The first is the fact that the Presbyterian denomination of which he is a member does not see the **mode of baptism** as being immersion, but rather *sprinkling*. Therefore when Holland sees the word "buried" (immersion) in connection with baptism here in Rom 6:4, he has to work overtime to disconnect it from water baptism so that it will not conflict with his denominational practice of sprinkling.

Secondly, his Presbyterian tradition of *infant baptism* (or covenant baptism of children) is also challenged by Paul's statements here about believers being baptized. The requirement of faith to be "in Christ" is here tightly connected with "baptism into Christ". That faith connection to baptism is in seeming conflict with his practice of infant baptism. Those are two apparent reasons why Holland may be laboring so hard to interpret this baptism as something other than water baptism. And those same two factors may also be part of the reason why he is so strongly motivated to develop this collective body approach to not only baptism, but to soteriology and eschatology as well.

However, as we will show from several other commentaries, the context of Rom. 6:3-4 is not talking about a collective body being raised out of covenantal death by some kind of collective baptism at the Cross. Instead, we will see that Paul is talking about the meaning that water baptism had for those individual Christians in their covenantal relationship to Christ. It is true that they were the collective body of Christ, and Paul does talk about the collective body later in the book of Romans (ch. 12), but that is not the focus in this context here in Romans 5-7. Here is what some of the various commentaries have to say about that:

[Rom 6:3] DOUGLAS MOO -- Paul argues in Rom 6:3 that death to sin is part and parcel of becoming a Christian. For baptism involves us with the death of Christ, a death that itself is a death to sin (as Paul will argue in vv. 8-10). By introducing this teaching with the phrase "or are you ignorant," Paul signifies that what he is saying has a basis in what the Roman Christians already know about baptism and Christian experience. Paul's reference is to the Roman Christians' water baptism as their outward initiation into the Christian existence. To be sure, a few scholars have denied any reference to water baptism here, arguing that "baptize" means "immerse" in a metaphorical sense, or that Paul refers to "baptism in the Spirit," or that he uses "baptize" as a metaphor for incorporation into the body of Christ. But, without discounting the possibility of allusions to one or more of these ideas, a reference to water baptism is primary. By the date of Romans [AD 58], "baptize" had become almost a technical expression for the rite of Christian initiation by water, and this is surely the meaning the Roman Christians would have given the word. [NICNT, *Romans*, Douglas Moo, p. 359]

[Rom 6:3] THOMAS SCHREINER -- The reference to baptism is introduced as a designation for those who are believers in Christ. Since unbaptized Christians were virtually nonexistent, to refer to those who were baptized is another way of describing

those who are Christians, those who have put their faith in Christ. Thus Paul is saying here that all Christians have participated in the death and burial of Christ, for all Christians had received baptism. To posit that the baptism mentioned here is simply metaphorical (Dunn 1988a: 311) or baptism in the Spirit (Lloyd-Jones 1973) rather than water baptism is incorrect. [Douglas] Moo (1991:376) observes rightly that Paul normally uses the verb BAPTIZEIN (to baptize) to refer to water baptism (1 Cor 1:13, 14, 15, 16 [twice], 17; 12:13; 15:29; Gal. 3:27). Roman Christians would have inevitably thought of water baptism since it was the universal initiation rite for believers in Christ. Moreover, Paul probably loosely associated baptism with water and baptism by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), since both of these occurred at conversion. Thus any attempt to distinguish between Spirit baptism and water baptism in the Pauline writings goes beyond what Paul himself wrote. [footnote: Contra Stott (1994: 173), who goes beyond the evidence by distinguishing between water and Spirit baptism here. Stott is correct in saying that Paul was thinking of water baptism here, but it would never have occurred to Paul that baptism in water could be separated from baptism in the Spirit.] [ECNT, *Romans*, Thomas Schreiner, pp. 306-307]

[Rom 6:3] LEON MORRIS -- Paul turns to baptism, which is perhaps surprising. But it helps him make his point emphatically. "Or" points to the alternative to what he has just been saying. If his readers do not understand what it means to die to sin, they do not understand what baptism means, and baptism comes right at the beginning of the Christian life. His question implies that this is something the Roman Christians would be expected to know. Since Paul had not been to Rome he plainly regards this as knowledge common to all Christians. We may perhaps miss something of what he is saying because for us "baptized" evokes liturgical associations; it points to a comforting and inspiring piece of ceremonial. But in the first century, while the verb could denote this ceremony and Paul certainly means that here, to "baptize" evoked associations of violence. It meant "immerse" rather than "dip". It was used, for example, of people being drowned, or of ships being sunk. ...When it is applied to Christian initiation we ought not to think in terms of gentleness and inspiration; it means death, death to a whole way of life. It is this that is Paul's point here. Christians are people who have died, and their baptism emphasizes that death. Death runs through this passage and is mentioned in every verse up to v. 13. We should not let the modern associations of baptism blind us to the point Paul is making so strongly. He is saying that it is quite impossible for anyone who understands what baptism means to acquiesce cheerfully in a sinful life. *The baptized have died to all that!* [Pillar NTC, *Romans*, Leon Morris, pp. 246-247]

[Rom 6:3] ROBERT HALDANE -- *Baptized into Jesus Christ* -- By faith believers are made one with Christ: they become members of His body. This oneness is represented emblematically by baptism. Baptized into His death -- In baptism, they are also represented as dying with Christ. This rite, then, proceeds on the fact that they have died with Him who bore their sins. Thus the satisfaction rendered to the justice of God by Him, is a satisfaction from them, since they are constituent parts of His body. The believer is one with Christ as truly as he was one with Adam -- he dies with Christ as truly as he died with Adam. Christ's righteousness is his as truly as Adam's sin was his. By a Divine constitution, all Adam's posterity are one with him, and so his first sin is really and truly theirs. By a similar Divine constitution, all Christ's people are one with Him, and His obedience is as truly theirs as if they had yielded it, and His death as if they had suffered it. When it is said that Christians have died with Christ, [it is no more figurative] than when it is said that they have died in Adam. [*Exposition of Romans*, Haldane, pp. 244-245]

What is the Origin of Christian Baptism?

Origin of Christian Baptism: (ask for my PDF - "Origin of Baptism")

It should be apparent that John the Baptizer didn't just pop onto the Jewish scene in A.D. 25 and say something like, "Folks, I'm starting something totally new today that you have never seen before. It is called 'baptism' and here is how it goes...." The very least we must admit is that baptism was familiar enough to the Jewish people of John's day that it didn't provoke any challengers in regard to its mode. The mode was not the issue with John's critics. It was who John was NOT claiming to be that bothered them: "... the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ...'Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' " (Jn. 1:19-25) These words imply rather strongly that the Jews expected the Messiah or one of his precursors to "baptize" (or purify) the Jewish people in preparation for the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. John was doing the very thing they expected only "the Christ, Elijah or the Prophet" to do. Where did they get this expectation? Did the OT prophets suggest anything of the sort? Yes, of course (cf. Ezek. 36:25; Dan. 9:24; Zech. 13,14; Mal. 3,4). So, there are two things we can learn from this exchange between John the Baptizer and the priests/Levites. One is that baptism (whatever its mode) was already familiar in Judaism of that day, and secondly that it was (prophetically and eschatologically) connected with the Messiah and his precursors. It seems very likely that John adopted the most common form of purification that was practiced in that day and attached the prophetic basis to it. So from the very beginning John's baptism (the precursor of Christian baptism) had more than just Levitical roots. It was connected directly to the prophets. And the prophets gave it ethical and eschatological meaning.

John's baptisms took place in the Jordan River (Mat. 3:6; Lk. 3:3) – this conformed to the Mosaic law, which required flowing or living water to provide a valid purification... That was one of the reasons why Naaman the leper from Syria was baptized in the Jordan river. One major difference between Jewish ritual immersion and Christian baptism has been mentioned by a number of scholars who have considered the possible relationship between the two. Jewish ritual immersion is purifying, or to use the technically correct term, **purificatory**. Christian baptism, on the other hand, is initiating, or **initiatory**; it is a one-time ritual that initiates the person into the Faith, unlike the Jewish purifications which were repeated over and over.

Initiatory baptism, however, has an even closer parallel in Jewish proselyte baptism. Three things were required of a proselyte to Judaism: circumcision, the offering of a sacrifice and *immersion in the mikvah* (and of course acceptance of the Torah, the Law). After the Roman destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, the sacrifice was no longer required. While the Church confined its missionary activities to Jews, circumcision was not an issue. When it decided to reach out to Gentiles, the requirement of circumcision was abrogated. This left ritual immersion in the mikvah as the only applicable Jewish requirement of conversion. Ritual immersion (i.e. baptism) became the central Christian initiatory rite...

Proselyte Baptism was an Antecedent

Jewish Proselyte Baptism seems to bear a very close resemblance and relationship to Christian baptism. It was an immersion (*tevilah*) in a *mikvah* (the immersion pool). I first learned of this ritual several years ago in my studies of Hebrew, Judaism, Talmud and Jewish History under orthodox rabbis in the synagogue, at the university and at the library. But for some unknown reason, very few books on Christian baptism say much about it. This was expected to be the case in books written by those who prefer sprinkling as the mode of baptism. They certainly have a vested interest in minimizing any connection between Christian Baptism and the Jewish immersion rituals. But I did not expect the immersionists to deal so scantily with it. Thankfully there were some great exceptions to the rule in both camps, and we will note some of these as we go along. Part of the reason the connection with proselyte baptism was not taken more seriously was because there was some doubt as to whether proselyte baptism was even in practice in Judaism before John the Baptist. But more careful examination of the oldest (Tannaitic, Mishnaic) Talmudic evidence from pre-Christian times, as well as the practices of the Essenes at Qumran, has confirmed that it was in practice before John came on the scene and started baptizing in the Jordan river. And also in the *Biblical Archaeology Review* magazine a couple of decades ago they showed pictures of some of the hundreds of *mikvaot* (ritual immersion pools) that they dug up in the area right around the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem, again showing that immersion as the form of ritual purification in Judaism was already in practice before John the Baptist started doing it. With all those immersion pools near the entrance to the temple, it is easy to see how three thousand believers on the day of Pentecost could be baptized into Christ so quickly and easily. They didn't need to explain it. The ritual was already in practice and well understood long before John the Baptist and Pentecost.

Immersion in Preparation for the Gathering

John the Baptist stated that his baptism was associated with “fleeing from the wrath about to come” and in preparation (repentance) for participation in the gathering into the Kingdom that was about to come. Both of these purposes have prophetic and eschatological connections. The Jews knew that before the Messiah and His Kingdom came they would need to be purified. They knew that before they assembled with God for the eschatological covenant meeting they had to be purified. This assembling/gathering concept is deeply rooted in both Levitical legislation and the OT prophets and referred to repeatedly in the NT (the eschatological gathering/meeting). What we must remember is that before any such assembly or gathering or festival the Jews had to be purified, and this purification was an immersion (*tevilah*) in the *mikvah*. Since John the Baptist had this “preparation for the kingdom” idea in his teaching about baptism, it is a strong indicator about what mode of baptism he must have been practicing. The Jews would certainly have been familiar with and would have expected an immersion as the eschatological purification ritual. It is interesting that the Essenes purified themselves by immersion, and they connected it with the soon-coming kingdom.

Only One Baptism for both Jew and Gentile

We might note here the statements in Ephesians 4 which state there is “one baptism.” Both Jews (who had their own purifications) and the Gentiles (who were required to go through the mikvah after circumcision) had separate immersion rituals: for Jews it was a cleansing/purification in repentance to renew their inheritance in the coming kingdom, and for Gentiles it was to purify them of their Gentile uncleanness and initiate their fellowship in the covenant community of True Israel. But Paul (Eph. 4) says that now in Christ there are not two separate rituals. They both enter fellowship in the church the same way. There is now only one baptism that both Jews and Gentiles observe alike. For the Jew it symbolized a covenant renewal, a re-grafting back into their olive tree (Rom 11), being born again from above (John 3:5) into the spiritual family of Abraham. For the Gentile it pictured a covenant initiation, a first grafting into the olive tree and a rebirth into the spiritual family of Abraham. But the outward symbol was the same for both, and the spiritual blessings and fellowship it pictured was the same for both. So, there were not two different “baptisms” into Christ. Both Jew and Gentile shared in the same covenant sign which grafted or regrafted them all into the one true Olive Tree.

Jesus Mentioned Water Baptism in connection with the Kingdom:

In John 3:3-5, Jesus connected water baptism with repentance, and being born again from above, and preparation for entrance into the kingdom.

Continuation of Baptism after AD 70?

Was it Bound or Not Bound on the Gentiles? One way to determine whether something was destined to continue after AD 70 or not, was to see whether the Apostles bound (or did not bind) it upon the Gentiles. Why is this important? Because anything given to the Gentiles by the apostles most likely was meant to be permanent in the Kingdom for all ages to come. Apostle Paul was the champion of Gentile liberty. He absolutely would not allow Gentiles to be brought into bondage to anything that was destined to pass away at AD 70. He says this numerous times; especially in the books of Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Romans and Hebrews. In fact he goes so far as to say that anyone who binds circumcision and law keeping upon the Gentiles is accursed, they're separated from God. It was a different gospel. So Paul was very zealous to guard the freedom of the Gentiles from circumcision and law-keeping, since he knew those things were about to pass away. It would be of no value to bring the Gentiles under bondage to something that was about to pass away. And it would only repulse the Gentiles if they thought they had to submit to circumcision in order to be saved. So it would stand to reason that anything Paul does impose on the Gentiles must have been something that would endure throughout all ages of the Kingdom, otherwise Paul would not have given it to the Gentiles. Whatever was NOT bound on them was destined to pass away, so whatever WAS bound on them must have been something destined to continue in the Church beyond AD 70. This principle is most clearly seen in the Judaizer controversy of the first century church and how the Apostles (especially Paul) handled it:

1. It shows us how adamant Apostle Paul was against binding upon the Gentiles anything which was destined to pass away at AD 70 (such as circumcision and the sacrificial system).
2. Once we see how protective Paul was concerning Gentile freedom from the Law, we will then have full confidence and assurance that the things he DID bind upon the Gentiles COULD ONLY BE things that were absolutely essential and destined to remain in the Kingdom after AD 70.
3. Paul and all the apostles (like Jesus their teacher) were tightly focused on teaching and writing things that would guide the Church, not only until the End of the Age, but even afterwards "for all generations of the ages to come." [Eph. 3:21] They reminded their followers to remember what Christ had taught and what they (the apostles) had taught [2 Pet. 3:2], and to teach those things to faithful men who would keep on passing it on to successive generations. [2 Tim. 2:2] If all their teaching was going to change at AD 70, these are strange things to be saying.

BAPTISM:

1. Was performed on Gentiles, and even commanded (see Cornelius -- Acts 10). But it was not the thing that cleansed the sins away. Our hearts are cleansed by faith and by the Blood of Christ. Notice in Acts 10 and 11 that Cornelius was already pronounced clean BEFORE he was baptized, and the Holy Spirit was poured out on them BEFORE they were baptized. Baptism was a confession and testimony before men that we have entered into covenant with Christ. It is a covenant symbol or sign showing to the church and to the world that we are Christians, and that we have died to our old way of life in the world and have been resurrected spiritually to walk in newness of life. That symbolism still applies to us today. Nothing about that covenant symbolism was done away with at AD 70.
2. In view of Paul's intense protection of Gentile liberty from circumcision and law-keeping, it would be contradictory for him to practice this among the Gentiles before AD 70, and then revoke it afterwards.
3. Granted, it may have a shift in meaning after AD 70 (like the Lord's Supper did), but there is no indication it was to cease. After AD 70 it is no longer a purification in preparation for the coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom, but a purification in covenant union with the Messiah and inclusion in His Fully Arrived Kingdom.
4. It was a "covenant ritual" to picture a covenant relationship, or to bear testimony to the existence of a covenant relationship that has been established.
5. It was a covenant symbol, given to Gentiles. It was symbolic of new birth and a change of status and condition. It was a symbol of their being raised up to live again after their old sinful lifestyle had died and been buried in union with Christ through the symbolic burial of baptism.

Conclusion:

Well, that is all we have time for in this session. Hope that helped you understand the subject of baptism a little bit better. Be sure to email me and request the **PDF** on the **Origin of Baptism**. That is a very thorough study of the subject. You will definitely want to take a look at it, if you are the least bit unsure of what baptism is all about.

Next time we will take a look at the broader context of Romans 5-7 to see what Paul is really talking about here in reference to dying to sin and the body of sin. I hope to show that it is not talking about a collective body at all, but rather talking about what happens to individuals as they initially become Christians and then persevere into sanctification.

You might want to study those three chapters of Romans (5-7) before we get together here next time. Thanks so much for listening.

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