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Pictures of Baptism

By Bill Lockwood

Baptism is *into Christ* (Galatians 3:27). That is, baptism is the act whereby a sinner is removed from the world and placed into a state of salvation. Many well-meaning religious minds suppose that water baptism is *not* essential to salvation, but in this they are mistaken. The New Testament has drawn several pictures for us to assist us in our learning of the importance of water baptism. Consider three of them.

Romans 6:3,4. *“Or are you ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.”* Here, Paul insists that Christians should no longer live in sin. Why? The “old person” was put away at baptism. Greek scholar J.B. Lightfoot observed: “Baptism is the grave of the old man, and the birth of the new.” What, according to this verse, does baptism symbolize or picture? Paul puts it plainly — Christ’s own burial and resurrection.

1 Peter 3:21. *“The like figure whereunto baptism does also now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.”* What picture or symbol does Peter point to when he says “the like” or “similar” figure? Verse 20 answers the question. Noah (in Genesis) and his family were saved “by water.” This then becomes the figure whereby *we also are saved by water*. Water alone? Hardly. By the grace of God “*baptism does also now save us.*” The point that Peter makes regarding Noah is simple. The dividing line between the old world and Noah’s “new life” was water. Water alone? No—by the grace of God, of course. Water of baptism is the picture of Noah’s salvation and is the dividing line between the old and the new. So also with us.

Colossians 2:11,12. *“In whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made by hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God ...”* In this picture Paul likens baptism to “circumcision.” That was the rite applied to baby boys by law in the Old Testament whereby flesh was cut away. So also, says the apostle, baptism is the place where the cutting off of the “body of flesh” takes place.

In the first passage the import of baptism is seen in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. So we also rise to walk in newness of life. In the second, the waters of baptism are illustrated by Noah’s flood. Water was the line of demarcation in Noah’s day—so also in ours. The third picture shows baptism as where circumcision of the flesh occurs. The flesh is the life of sin. God cuts that off of our heart when we are “baptized into Christ.”