

BAPTISM

Of water and
The Holy Spirit

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Baptism

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to Nate, Rashad, Aaron, and the others who attend the Relentless Fire Bible Study and are part of the Radical Discipleship Movement. These people earnestly desire to act on the command of Jesus to “Go into the entire world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”

I applaud the zeal of this group of young men and women to fulfill this command. The editors and I pray that the subject of water baptism which seems to be at the center of our conversation is looked at through the context of its historical setting. In other words; How did the first disciples of Jesus and the Apostles, men who taught, preached, and defended the truths of their predecessors against heresies within the historical church community, understand and communicate the truths contained in the writings of their teachers which became our scriptures?

We ask this question because Scripture, and the correct interpretation and understanding of it should be our final authority to establish truth. This must take a position of preeminence in our studies if our objective is to know Jesus. This is essential if we desire to fulfill his command. This is where we start if we want to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit and receive eternal life.

Table of Contents

Introduction - 9

Born of Water and the Spirit - 13

Spirit Baptism - 25

Water Baptism - 37

Historical Debate - 49

Infant Baptism - 71

Nicene Creed - 81

Confession of Faith - 93

Commandment to Baptize - 103

Introduction

The heart of Christianity is the Gospel. It is defined in the New Testament as; the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (I Corinthians 15:1-4). The entire premise of the New Testament is that we are dead in our sins separated from God, but He has made a way to reconcile us unto Himself and restore us to life through the Gospel. This way of salvation was accomplished solely by what God did through the person of Jesus. This salvation is a gift from God to those who believe in Jesus and is not based on performance (Ephesians 2:8,9). This salvation does not come by the observance of church liturgy, observance of sacraments, observance of laws and ordinances, by church membership or by any other holy or kind gesture. This salvation comes solely based on what God has already done and we accept, believe, and receive it by faith, trusting God that it is so. Not merely intellectual consent but by believing with the heart.

God calls us out of darkness into his glorious light (1st Peter 2:9) and we respond yes or no. Jesus told people on many occasions, "Follow me." When they responded with yes what they were saying was, "I will trust and follow Him," or in other words, "Thy will be done." On a regular basis the New Testament contrasts the difference between those who follow Jesus, who believe and repent, as being recipients of eternal life, sons of God, with those who because of hardness of heart don't believe, who remain in a state of eternal death, perishing, being referred to as children of wrath.

So with salvation so plainly evident as being a gift based on one's faith, how is it that some teach that "water baptism takes away sins" and is "the way in which a person receives eternal life," or even more important, "That unless a person is baptized by someone who knows they are baptizing to take away the sins of the baptizee, the one being baptized remains dead in their sins?"

This view of water baptism is sometimes referred to as baptismal regeneration but should be referred to more accurately as baptismal salvation. Baptismal regeneration was taught and understood as a biblical New Testament practice by the historical Orthodox Church, however, their understanding of water baptism and the scriptures related to it was quite different from what is taught today as baptismal salvation. Today's errant version of baptismal salvation is taught by three groups; Mormons-Latter day Saints and their affiliates, United Pentecostals and their affiliates, and Church of Christ and their affiliates. Roman Catholicism also teaches a form of baptismal salvation which is different from these others yet is still not consistent with apostolic Christianity.

The objective of this book is to clearly define the historical Christian view on salvation and how water baptism relates to it, and to examine scriptures that pertain to this subject through the use of commentary written by the early church Fathers. When the writings of the founders of the Church are examined,

the practice of baptism and the scriptures, liturgy, and language that relate to it are seen and understood much more clearly and easily.

For example; John 3:5 says, “Unless you are born of water and of the Spirit you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” All of the early fathers understood this passage of scripture with 100% consistency to be taken as water and spiritual baptism. So why is that? Did they interpret this passage to mean that water baptism takes away sin? By examining their commentary on this passage of scripture a clear understanding can be ascertained. This is critically important because scripture, and the correct interpretation of it, is our final authority on truth and doctrine.

It is the objective of the author to layout a concise and accurate examination of the historical Church on this matter and to help the reader understand that the historical practices of the Church were quite different from some of today’s practices. For this reason confusion exists in modern teachings on water baptism and how it relates to salvation. The author is confident that by examining the commentary on scripture provided by those who founded the Church, taught within its communities and defended its doctrine against heresy, that a clear understanding of their practices and teaching will be made evident. It will answer the questions, “Does water baptism take away sin?” and “How does a person receive eternal life?”



“Born of Water and of the Spirit”

John 3:5



Jesus said, 'You must be born again or you can not enter the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus asked Jesus, 'Can a man being old be born again by entering his mother's womb a second time?' Jesus answered him, 'You must be be born again of water and of the Spirit or you can not enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Therefore I tell you, you must be born again.' **John 3:3-7**

From this dialogue recorded in John's Gospel between Jesus and Nicodemus two questions arise. First, "How is someone born again?" And second, "What does it mean to be born of the water and the Spirit?" These are very important questions because they explain how a person receives eternal life and enters the kingdom of God. In answering the first question the words of Peter explain this more than adequately. He claims that we are born again by hearing and believing the word of God.

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect..... 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1st Peter 1:18-25

Paul also explains this process in the first chapter of Ephesians; We trusted and believed after we heard the word of God, and we were then sealed by spiritual baptism which is spiritual regeneration. This is what being born of the Spirit means.

13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

Ephesians 1:13

Paul reiterates this again in chapter two and in Romans chapter ten:

"We are saved by grace through faith"

Ephesians 2:8 and

"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" **Romans 10:17.**

It is interesting and almost amusing how Paul states the same thing to the Corinthians:

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. **1st Corinthians 1:21**

Here Paul attests to the fact that it is pleasing to God that by the foolishness of preaching those who believe would be saved. "By the foolishness of preaching!" He calls preaching foolishness! From these few passages it should be clear that we are born again by hearing the word of God and believing it. This will be a redundant point in the chapters that follow because of the importance of these questions. To address the second question it was touched on while examining Ephesians 1:13.

"Born again of the Spirit." Being born of the Spirit is a spiritual regeneration that takes place when we are baptized and sealed with the Holy Spirit. This happens by the Holy Spirit of God coming and living in us when we believe the word that was preached. We become living temples of the Holy Spirit and at that time we become one Spirit with the Lord and share in his life which is eternal (1st Corinthians 6:15-20). We were spiritually dead in our sins but passed from death to life when we believed.

"Born again of water." In John 3:5 water was always understood by the historical Christian Church to mean water baptism. Some modern scholars disagree with this historical view stating that the context of 'water' is found in the Lord's statement, "That which is flesh is flesh and that which is spirit is spirit." In making this observation they will then claim that the 'water' is in context with 'the flesh' and refers to the water of natural or physical birth. If however water in this case were physical birth it would conclude with the problem of the observation of Nicodemus which is; born of the water is stated as "Again" and if it were again it would mean a second physical birth. This argument fails at this point and can not be correct. It is not the view of historical orthodoxy either. The historical view of the John 3:5 scripture and its meaning of 'water' in the text was always understood as baptism. Here are a few citations:

Justin: *1st Apology, 61* 135ad

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ.....they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Irenaeus: *Fragments, 34* 175ad

"And dipped himself," says the Scripture, "seven times in Jordan" 2 Kings 5:14. It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but it served as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: "Unless a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Tertullian: *On baptism, 13* 210ad

The sealing act of baptism; the clothing, in some sense, of the faith which before was bare, and which cannot exist now without its proper law. For the law of baptizing has been imposed, and the formula prescribed: "Go," He says, "teach the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The comparison with this law of that definition, "Unless a man have been reborn of water and Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of the heavens," has tyed faith to the necessity of baptism. Accordingly, all thereafter who became believers used to be baptized.

Hippolytus: *Theophany, 8* 200ad

The Father of immortality sent the immortal Son and Word into the world, who came to man in order to wash him with water and the Spirit; and He, begetting us again to incorruption of soul and body, breathed into us the breath (spirit) of life, and endued us with an incorruptible panoply. If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be God. And if he is made God by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection from the dead.

Cyprian: *Epistles, 71:1* 250ad

When they [heretics] come to us and to the Church which is one, ought to be baptized, for the reason that it is a small matter to "lay hands on them that they may receive the Holy Ghost," unless they receive also the baptism of the Church. For then finally can they be fully sanctified, and be the sons of God, if they be born of each sacrament; since it is written, "Unless a man be born again of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Cyrl: *Catechetical lectures, 3:4* 347ad

When going down, therefore, into the water, think not of the bare element, but look for salvation by the power of the Holy Ghost: for without both you can not possibly be made perfect. It is not I that say this, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power in this matter: for He says, 'Unless a man be born anew' and He adds the words, 'of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' Neither does he that is baptized with water, but not found worthy of the Spirit, receive the grace in perfection; nor if a man be virtuous in his deeds, but receive not the seal by water, shall he enter into the kingdom of heaven. A bold saying, but not mine, for it is Jesus who has declared it.

Basil the Great: *The Holy Spirit, 15:35* 370ad

This then is what it is to be born again of water and of the Spirit, the being made dead being effected in the water, while our life is wrought in us through the Spirit. In three immersions, then, and with three invocations, the great mystery of baptism is performed, to the end that the type of death may be fully figured, and that by the tradition of the divine knowledge the baptized may have their souls enlightened. It follows that if there is any grace in the water, it is not of the nature of the water, but of the presence of the Spirit. For baptism is "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God"
1 Peter 3:21.

Chrysostom: *Homilies on the Gospel of John, 25:1,2* 380ad
Let us now attend to the sequel of what has been before said..... "Verily I say unto you, Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." What He declares is this: "You say that it is impossible, I say that it is so absolutely possible as to be necessary, and that it is not even possible otherwise to be saved." That the need of water is absolute and indispensable, you may learn in this way. On one occasion, when the Spirit had flown down before the water was applied, the Apostle did not stay at this point, but, as though the water were necessary and not superfluous, observe what he says; "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Acts 10:47

What then is the use of the water? This too I will tell you hereafter, when I reveal to you the hidden mystery. There are also other points of mystical teaching connected with the matter, but for the present I will mention to you one out of many. What is this one? In Baptism are fulfilled the pledges of our covenant with God; burial and death, resurrection and life; and these take place all at once. For when we immerse our heads in the water, the old man is buried as in a tomb below, and wholly sunk forever; then as we raise them again, the new man rises in its stead. As it is easy for us to dip and to lift our heads again, so it is easy for God to bury the old man, and to show forth the new. And this is done thrice, that you may learn that the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost fulfills all this.

Without adding commentary from Chrysostom's contemporaries, Jerome and Augustine, we can see from the earlier historical record that 'water' in John 3:5 was understood to mean water baptism. Now that this fact has been thoroughly established the redundant questions must be asked again, "Does John 3:5 say that the water takes away sins, or that a person's sins are not taken away if the baptizer and baptizee don't both understand that the baptism is for that purpose?" No! It only says that both are necessary. It doesn't say that spiritual regeneration takes place because of the water. In fact, all of the New Testament says the exact opposite; that if regeneration takes place in the water it is because of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This claim will be examined in more detail in the following chapters.

So why do many of the historical commentaries appear to say that regeneration takes place at the laver, in the waters of baptism, and that remission takes place at the same? This is a very important question, and be assured that there will be an explanation in the following chapters. This question will be addressed by the same writings of church Fathers which were cited in this chapter. Other historical testimony will be brought to the witness stand as well because the explanation needs to leave no doubt as to the correct answer to this critical question. The answer must leave no doubt as to the Apostolic and Ante-Nicene Fathers' view of scripture because as was stated earlier; Scripture, and the correct interpretation of it is critical. The issue of eternal life or death hangs in its balance.

Born of Water and of the Spirit



Spirit Baptism



In the last chapter we began by examining two baptisms; water and Spirit. This chapter will explore in more detail the topic of spiritual baptism. When the word baptism appears in these chapters please remember the definition of the word while reading. The verb "Baptize" (Greek=Baptizo) literally means "To dip." It is the placement of one thing inside another. In water baptism the believer is placed into the water. In spiritual baptism the Holy Spirit is placed into the believer.

When we read through the Gospels and the book of Acts we find that it is clearly stated that spiritual baptism is superior to water baptism. The water of water baptism does nothing whereas the Holy Spirit of spiritual baptism does the supernatural. When the Holy Spirit enters a man's heart He regenerates the inner man which causes eternal life, and because this often happened at the time of water baptism, water baptism became synonymous with regeneration and salvation. The superiority of spiritual baptism over water baptism can be seen in the following passages.

I [John] baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.-**Matthew 3:11**

Spirit Baptism

The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'-**John 1:33**

Jesus commanded them saying, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."- **Acts 1:4,5**

Peter said, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"- **Acts 11:15,16**

Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."- **Acts 19:2-4**

The water of John's baptism served a purpose. His baptism was the identification with righteousness. It was a confession of sins (Matthew 3:6) and repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). It is important to understand that in "The remission of sins" at John's baptism, the penitent's sins were only covered, they were not taken away. But after the death of Jesus the sacrifice of his blood did what all other religious practices could not do and that is, remove, or take away sins. [See John 1:29, Hebrews 9:11-14,22, 10:1-19, Revelation 1:5, 1st John 1:7, Romans 3:25, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14]

Spiritual baptism is superior to John's baptism in that it not only takes away sin but gives eternal life. This spiritual baptism happens as the result of faith. It is the promised gift from God to those who believe.

Those who believe in Jesus receive remission of sins **Acts 10:43.**

Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness **Romans 4:3.**

Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ **Romans 5:1.**

.... If you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved. Because it is with the heart that man believes and is counted as righteous....

Romans 10:9,10.

Spirit Baptism

Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith **Galatians 2:16.**

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? **Galatians 3:1,2.**

The answer to this rhetorical question is, 'they received spiritual baptism by the hearing of faith'.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God
Romans 10:17.

It is extremely clear especially from the Galatians three passage that the gift of the Holy Spirit, spiritual baptism, is received by as the KJV says, "the hearing of faith." As the NIV says, "Believing what they heard." Faith is the avenue by which this regeneration comes; by believing in your heart. In numerous places in John's Gospel we are taught this very thing from the mouth of Jesus that "those who believe will not perish but have (present tense) eternal life." John makes the point at the end of his Gospel account that the purpose for the information contained in his written testimony is so the reader would be able by it to have enough to believe, believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing receive eternal life. These are the words of Jesus from John's record;

Spirit Baptism

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.... 36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." **John 3:14-18,36**

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but HAS PASSED from death into life. **John 5:24**

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."....Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. **John 6:40,47**

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. **John 7:38,39**

Spirit Baptism

25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. **John 10:25-28**

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

John 11:25,26

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. **John 17:20,21**

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. **John 20:30,31**

To summarize John's Gospel it is a redundant point that Jesus makes which is; Those who believe in Him receive the Holy Spirit and have eternal life. This spiritual baptism comes by faith, by believing in Him. There are no contingencies added to any of these passages which direct the way to Jesus and receipt of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. However some argue from other passages of scripture that spiritual baptism comes from the reception of water baptism. The scriptures which they cite are generally misunderstood. This usually happens as the result of not understanding the passages in their historical context. The historical context will be addressed in the chapter on water baptism which will follow, but be assured of the fact that spiritual baptism comes by faith and faith comes by hearing the word of God.

As a segway to the next two chapters on water baptism and the historical debate over re-baptism of heretics, it is necessary to understand that the most referenced scripture by the third century Church relating to their point of agreement on the issue and their point of contention, is the event recorded in Acts chapter ten that told of the first Gentile conversion at the house of Cornelius. The patristic writings which addressed the subject of re-baptism will follow in the chapter about the debate, but first, read the passage from Acts chapter ten:

Spirit Baptism

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all, 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. 40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be

Spirit Baptism

baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days. **Acts 10:34-48**

It is as clear today as it was at the time of the inception of the Church that baptism of the Holy Spirit came by believing, by the hearing of faith, and the scripture shows that this happened before water baptism. From this text it is clear that spiritual regeneration came by hearing the Gospel message, which is the word of God and there were no prerequisites or contingencies attached to it. Acts 10:47 establishes the fact that these Gentiles received the Holy Spirit just the same as Peter and his Jewish companions.

If you compare the conversion of the household of Cornelius with the experience Peter is referring to (Acts 2:1-4) you see that ALL who were present "WERE FILLED" with the Holy Spirit. This is Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Remember the definition? The placing of one thing (the Holy Spirit) into another thing (those who believe). This is what was promised by Jesus in Acts 1:4,5, received by the Apostles in Acts 2:4, repeated by Peter in Acts 2:38, received by Cornelius and the Gentiles in Acts 10:44-47, and recalled by Peter in Acts 11:15-17. They received the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Those who were with Cornelius that heard Peter were filled with the Holy Spirit the same as those at the day of Pentecost. They exercised the same spiritual gifts, that were evidence of spiritual baptism (1st Corinthians 12), in the same manner as the other believers. And the elephant in the room that can't be missed is the fact that this happen before there was even any discussion about being baptized in water. This passage of scripture proves that the regeneration of salvation does not come from the water of water baptism, it comes from the Holy Spirit in spiritual baptism; which comes by faith!