

Jesus Was Baptized for Our Righteousness

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Matthew 3:13-17 ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"* ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice *came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

Our sinful nature is such that we often take God's wonderful blessings and turn them into a commandment. God's intention is to give us a blessing. We, however, respond with an attitude of, "Do I have to?"

This is something that happens often with Genesis 9:1. Here the word of God says that he blessed Noah and his sons and said, "be fruitful and multiply." God's word clearly says this is a great and wonderful blessing. But what do people do? Some people turn up their noses at God's wonderful gift and say or think, "Children are such a bore I don't want to have to take care of them." Meanwhile others make it into law. They preach that God says you must have children. God's word only presents this as God's blessing, not as a law.

John the baptizer perhaps without realizing it does the same thing with Jesus' baptism. For what does he say when Jesus comes to be baptized. He says, "**I need to be baptized by you and not you by me.**" God comes as a man to dwell with men. He comes in the person of Jesus to be baptized. He does this so that he can take our place under the law and give us his righteousness. Jesus is the righteous one who does not need the washing of baptism. He comes anyway for our sake.

What John does correctly with these words is to rightfully recognizes himself as a sinner and Jesus as righteous. In this attitude we certainly ought to follow John's example whenever we come to be baptized, or whenever we are reminded of our baptism, or even every day when we drown our old man in contrition and repentance. We ought to daily recognize that I am the sinner who needs my sins daily washed away. Jesus is the righteous one who gives me his righteousness in my baptism. It was not Jesus who needed sins washed away, but we need this. Jesus in his love was baptized so that through our baptism we might receive his righteousness. As Peter reminds us:

1 Peter 3:18 **18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,**

The just for the unjust. Those four words form a phrase which we ought to meditate upon every day. This is what Luther meant when he says, "We ought to daily drown our old man in contrition and

repentance.” Every day we consider the fact that I am unjust and Jesus was the just one, but that he both was baptized and died so that through my baptism his righteousness becomes mine.

Although John is correct that he is unrighteous and Jesus is righteous, he makes this mistake that he talks about what is necessary instead of recognizing in Christ's baptism the wonderful gift or blessing which God has come to give. He is viewing baptism according to the law. He is thinking about what is necessary instead of according to the gospel. He thinks of what is needed instead of God's grace or gift of blessing.

In this we must be alert and careful never to emulate John. Anyone who comes to baptism according to the law comes in the wrong way. Anyone who is thinking I will do it because it is necessary, or thinking by doing this I will show God what a good person I am, such a person comes not in faith to receive the blessing of God, but rather they come in arrogance thinking they will do something for God to make him happy. Jesus did not come down to earth and was baptized in the Jordan river so that you could do something for him but so that he could do something for you.

Jesus illustrates this very thing in the parable of the king's wedding feast.

Matthew 22:11-13 11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 "So he said to him, ` Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 "Then the king said to the servants, ` Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The man who comes to baptism thinking he will do something for God, is the same as this man who comes to the wedding feast wearing his own garment. We cannot come before God wearing our own garment. We must come to baptism in faith and accept the garment that Jesus gives us. Only with this garment that Christ gives to us can we enter heaven.

Jesus baptism was not necessary according to the law but it was the free gift of God.

When we come to baptism or when we meditate upon Jesus' baptism we do not speak of commandments or obligations. Instead, we speak of the grace of God and the gift of God. We speak of Christ who accepted baptism, counting himself among the sinners to take the place of sinners. For this reason and this reason alone, we are set free from sin and may enter heaven.

It is for this reason that Jesus will not allow John to stop him. Instead, he tells John, "**Permit it to fulfill all righteousness.**" That is to say, "do not stop me from doing this for by this act I will give to you and all people all righteousness."

“To fulfill all righteousness”

What does this mean?

There are two possible meanings for what Jesus says here. Both are scriptural, that is both are clearly taught by scripture and in connection with Jesus' baptism.

The first is this that in baptism he takes our place under the law and then he is able to fulfill in our place the righteousness which we should have done and did not do. Thus, it was necessary for him to be baptism in order to fulfill all the righteousness of men, that is all the righteousness that all humans owed to God.

Galatians 4:4-5 ⁴ **But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,** ⁵ **to redeem those who were under the law,**

In His baptism Jesus took our place to fulfill all the righteousness that we owe God.

Romans 3:21-22 **21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.**

The second is that in baptism he gives to us and all who believe, all his righteousness. He fulfills all righteousness by giving us his righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 **21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

Romans 6:3-4 **3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**

Neither Jesus baptism nor our own is a law or a commandment. Baptism is a gracious and wonderful blessing from our heavenly father. In Jesus baptism he who knew no sin took our place under the law in order to do what we could not do. In our baptism the righteousness of Christ is given to us, so that we are indeed dressed in the king's wedding garment. In this way Christ has fulfilled all righteousness. Amen