

## **The Omnipotent God of Self-Restraint**

‘A little boy went to his mother and asked her what the next-door neighbors were going to name their brand-new baby girl. The mother replied that she thought they were going to name the baby after her grandmother. The boy thought for a moment and then said, “Mom, you mean to say that they’e going to call that tiny little baby ‘Grandma’?”’

Here is illustrated one of the results of baptism, which may not be fully realized, one of several. Namely, that of receiving a new name. For what does being baptized actually mean? In a proper baptism, the person being baptized is making a public statement of faith in the Lord Jesus, publicly acknowledging that the person has repented of all sin, and is turning to the Lord, turning over a new leaf as it were, starting brand new, and giving their life from this point onward to the service of God Almighty. Exclusively. Thus, whether they realize it or not, they are receiving a new name, several new titles, and the treasuries of Heaven are now accessible to them, as their new Father in Heaven determines when they’re ready for each and every new gift, assignment, power and authority. For when we’re baptized, we’re declaring that our old lives are over and done with. That our old selves have died, and been buried in the waters of baptism. That

all our sin has been washed away in the waters of baptism because Lord Jesus has shed His blood upon them, providing the complete and total sacrifice which takes away our sin, permanently, once and for all. The water in and of itself has no “magical” properties. It’s merely a physical substance which symbolizes and provides a visible sign that a profound, momentous, life and death, spiritual exchange has been ratified and inaugurated.

Baptism marks a before and after pivot point in every believer’s life. Or at least it’s supposed to. If done correctly and all parties to the contract uphold and fulfill their obligations, then the binding terms which bring with them all the innumerable promises and blessings of God will never be broken. Problems arise when the terms are abrogated. Since God never, ever breaks His promises and His word, He is always and forever in perfect compliance with all terms of the spiritual contract, whenever a problem arises, it is always when the humans on this end of the contract break the terms by our sins, conscious or unawares. Which is why we must confess all sin, known and unknown, daily. And why we do so every Sunday at the beginning of our time of worship. For without clean hands and pure hearts, we can not genuinely worship God. Without them, we simply go through the motions, and our praises are simply lip service, devoid of real meaning and spiritual significance.

Baptism also necessarily signifies that the baptized become followers of the one in whose name they are baptized. Thus

when John the Baptizer baptized people in the Jordan River, because of his preaching which preceded baptism, the people knew they were being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins against the One and Only Living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And they committed their lives to following God, as the teaching and preaching of John instructed them. They now followed John the Baptizer as one who led them to Father God, to follow the ways of God.

Though it is not specifically stated in the account we read today from Luke, we know from Matthew's record that when Lord Jesus came to John to be baptized, John initially resisted, rightly stating that John himself needed to be baptized by the Lord. But the Lord told him in Matthew 3:15 that John needed to baptize the Lord in order to fulfill all righteousness, "It is only right to do all that God requires". So why did Father God "require" the very Son of God, Son of Man, to be baptized? Among the many reasons, let's focus only on the act of submission which this represented. Here is the veritable Lord God Almighty, clothed in human flesh as an ordinary, but extraordinary man because He was without sin at this point, and therefore in no need for baptism to wash away His sin, because He didn't have any! Nor would He ever. He would never sin, and thus would never need to be baptized. Yet He insisted John perform it. Here is the Creator and Lord of All the Universe submitted to a human man, John, who, according to this same Lord, was the greatest of human men. But why? Because,

if just for this one reason, Father God could and would now be able to declare that this *Man*, was the flesh and blood Son of God, Son of Man, with Whom He is well pleased. God is His father, not Joseph, the husband of Mary. And from this moment forward, He would have the very Holy Spirit in Person resting upon Him, and indwelling Him, as Holy Spirit manifested in the form of a white dove, came down and rested upon Christ Jesus.

John knew Who Lord Jesus was before the act of baptism was performed. The people didn't. Those gathered at the Jordan River that day were singled out to witness an extraordinary miracle, an unprecedented, never-to-be-repeated sign, which identified once for all time and space that this Man standing there waist-deep in the Jordan, was the One and Only God in human flesh. Dipped beneath the waters of the river, He stood again as the very representative of what every man and woman of all time and space must emulate, imitate, and indeed join lives in union with. For Christ Jesus is what Adam and all humanity was always meant to be. Here is He Who now shows us how we were always supposed to live. But it would take many truly following Him to accomplish the restoration of humanity and all of creation. And no one alive at that point could fathom exactly what Christ Jesus would have to go through in His life to put all things back on track! He not only would have to put up with all the usual difficulties of life, all the trials and tribulations, but be mercilessly attacked, denigrated, slandered, lied to and lied about. He would be societies'

preferred punching bag, for in the minds of nearly all the elite, He would take on the personification, not of God, but the devil's and the indubitable cause of all the world's ills. They thought if He were allowed to live, all of society would collapse and the world would come to a tragic end! Sound like anything we've been hearing the last few years about some people and the climate?

He thus knew first hand how evil, merciless and cruel humanity could be, for He became its target. No, they wouldn't allow Him to live. He had to die, and be killed in the most sadistic, vicious, inhuman, malevolent and bloodthirsty way that humanity could imagine. There was no reason for such hate. Simple execution would have sufficed. The end result would have been the same. But no, it had to be crucifixion! Remember how the frenzied crowd diabolically screamed, "Crucify Him!"? Like today's mindless protestors who've lost their minds, crazed and possessed, the crowd back then truly didn't realize what they were demanding. They were actually calling down on their own heads the blood of this innocent Man, this Son of God, Son of Man. They were making themselves guilty of the very murder of God.

But He, being God, could have put a stop to it at any point. He could have wiped out the whole kit and caboodle of them in an instant. Why, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He could have called down legions of angels who would have made short work of all the authorities and their squads of Roman soldiers who'd come to arrest Him. Even when He was directly tempted by the devil him-

self in the wilderness, for a whole 40 days, He could have simply winked at the devil and made him disappear into hell, never to be seen or heard from again. Why didn't He? Why did He go through all of that when He didn't have to?

Let's call it God's self-restraint. Because God is Who He is. Because God is love. Because God is truth. Because God is light. Because God is life itself. Because He is love, everything He has created and given life to He loves! What is the most beautiful, the absolute highest emotion, feeling and motivation of all existence? It's love! When we love, even us puny and flawed humans know this, that when we love, we make sacrifices for those whom we love! Depending on the intensity of our love, we will do the most extraordinary things for others. Even in the rare circumstance to give up our lives for others. And this is exactly what God in Lord Jesus did. In His "self-restraint" He showed us just how to live. And die. And live again eternally. He showed us how to become all who we were destined to be. And paradoxical-ly, from what He's shown us, it's all about seeking Him, seeking the good of others, as the Apostle Paul put it, to consider others as more important than yourself, in Philippians 2:3. This is God's way. This is God's very "DNA". It's ours, too, if we go to the Great Physician and be treated for our sin malady. He will cure it in the waters of baptism. And we will once again start to look like our actual Creator, our true Father, our Older Brother, Savior and Lord, Jesus, Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God, Son of Man.

