



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 10.7 – The Doctrine of Baptism

### The Baptism of John the Baptist

Jesus commanded to His disciples to baptize all nations after His suffering, death, and resurrection. But there had been a baptism before this time instituted by God Himself, for John the Baptist said: **“I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He (the Spirit) remained on Him (Jesus). I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God”** (John 1:32-34). It was God who sent John the Baptist to baptize with water; thus, John’s baptism was also instituted by God. Jesus also recognized that John’s baptism was **“from heaven”** and not **“from men”** (Matthew 21:25).

The baptism of John the Baptist was essentially the same as Christian baptism, for John’s baptism was also **“for the remission of sins”** (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). John baptized those who accepted his preaching of repentance and confessed their sins (Matthew 3:6). John’s role was preliminary – he was sent to prepare the way – as he said: **“That He (Christ) should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water”** (John 1:31).

When Jesus said to Nicodemus that one must be born again of water and the Spirit, He was referring to John’s baptism. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. It was very likely that he joined the other Pharisees in rejecting John’s baptism as unnecessary for them, for it is written: **“The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him (John the Baptist)”** (Luke 7:30). Rejecting John’s baptism was the same as rejecting the will of God.

John the Baptist was not the only one who was authorized to baptize. Jesus’ disciples also baptized at the same time as John. In fact, John’s disciples complained to John: **“Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified – behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”** (John 3:26). Jesus Himself did not baptize anyone, for it is written: **“When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee”** (John 4:1-3). Most likely Jesus’ disciples were baptized by John, and as Jesus’ disciples they continued to carry out John’s baptism for some time. There is no record that Jesus Himself ever baptized anyone. It was not until after His resurrection that Jesus gave the orders for all of His followers to baptize others in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We do not know whether John the Baptist baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Acts tells us about an eloquent speaker named Apollos who came to Ephesus a short time after Paul himself had visited that city on his second journey. The Bible says of Apollos that he **“had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John”** (Acts 18:25). Priscilla and Aquila **“took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately”** (Acts 18:26). There is no indication that Apollos was baptized a second time.

When the apostle Paul returned to Ephesus on his third mission journey, he met twelve disciples who had been baptized with John’s baptism. Paul explained to them that John the Baptist was a man of God who told the people **“that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus”** (Acts 19:4). Thus, John’s work of baptizing was only temporary.

The New Testament was written in Greek, which did not include quotation marks, so it is difficult for us to know how to understand the account in Acts 19. The New King James Version ends Paul's words in with verse 4. Some Lutheran teachers believe that verse 5 was also spoken by Paul, which changes what happened. Below is the account as punctuated in the New King James version. Following that is an alternate version which includes verse 5 in what Paul says.

The New King James Version (Acts 19:1-7):

**<sup>1</sup>And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples <sup>2</sup>he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"**

**So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."**

**<sup>3</sup>And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"**

**So they said, "Into John's baptism."**

**<sup>4</sup>Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."**

**<sup>5</sup>When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.**

The alternate version (Acts 19:1-7):

**<sup>1</sup>And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples <sup>2</sup>he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"**

**So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."**

**<sup>3</sup>And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"**

**So they said, "Into John's baptism."**

**<sup>4</sup>Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup>When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."**

**<sup>6</sup>And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.**

In the New King James Version, the twelve men were baptized twice: once with "John's baptism", then with the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. In the alternate version, the men were baptized only once, with John's baptism, which Paul explained to them more fully.

Regardless of whether these men were baptized once or twice, we cannot conclude from this account that John's baptism was different from the Christian baptism, as the clear passages we have studied above show that they both give the forgiveness of sins. Nor can we conclude that God does not give His Holy Spirit in baptism or that the Holy Spirit must be given by a separate laying on of hands. The Bible passages we have studied in this chapter clearly show that one receives God's gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism (see, for example, Peter's words on Pentecost in Acts 2:38). As mentioned in lesson 9.6, the Bible refers to the laying on of hands, but nowhere does Jesus command us to do so. Jesus has, however, commanded us to baptize.

## Questions

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1. Where did John the Baptist get the authority to baptize?
2. What makes John's baptism basically the same as Christian baptism today?
3. How did the Pharisees react to John's baptism?
4. Why did John's disciples complain to John about Jesus?
5. How Apollos deficient in his understanding of the Gospel?
6. What was missing in the knowledge of the twelve men Paul met in Ephesus?