

St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology

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The Most Rev. Metropolitan PHILIP, Primate

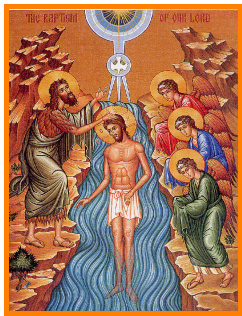
Fr. Jon Braun, President

Home of the Orthodox Study Bible: Septuagint Old Testament and New Testament

July 2010

Dear Friend of St. Athanasius Academy:

In answer to a Protestant asking about Baptism and its importance to Christian faith.



Faith founded in love, is a gift from God. We give ourselves to Him, soul and body, and in return, He grants us the gift of faith. This gifting is dynamic, on-going and beyond man's understanding. It begins in a daring trust in Him Who guides us to repent and be baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. In baptism, we are given the opportunity to be born from above as renewed and adopted children of God, while He gently washes away our sins, bathed in His kindness and mercy.

Baptism is also our commitment to God and the New Covenant which Christ alone established through His blood on the Cross. This is the covenant of eternal salvation given once and for all. Thus allowing each unique person the right to choose to enter into this everlasting relationship through the exercising of one's personal will. Thus as individuals, each of us will freely choose to either accept Him as Bridegroom or deny Him.

The promise of this new covenant concerns our resurrection to eternal life with Jesus. It also begins the renewing and restoration of the transformative relationship between God, man, and even creation by the power of the Light of Transfiguration. It is the Lord's plan for us to begin healing what was damaged and shattered in the Fall.

In choosing to seek the Lord's help, with a repentant heart and mindful spirit, we soon realize we can no longer trust our own ability to choose wisely apart from Him. With this, comes a sincere longing to return to Paradise, to Jesus, with Himself the first fruits of the Tree of Life. But this process needs our willing, interactive cooperation with Him. In so doing, He grants to us the opportunity to become free from the bondage of sin, by the gifting of faith and sending of the Holy Spirit, Who seals this faith within us. Now we have the ability, with His Grace in Baptism, to shine forth the hope and good works that glorify His Gospel. Such is the nature of the love of God and our relationship with Him.

Scripture indicates many people were first baptized and then received the Holy Spirit. However, as with Cornelius in Acts 10, some receive the Holy Spirit before baptism, This contrast makes clear the order is not key. Instead, baptism incorporates both: being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:3-10 further confirms its importance. The awe and wonder of God's Sacraments cannot be grasped or explain by this fallen world.

In dying with Christ, we die to sin, the ways of Satan, and fear of death. While at the same time, our preparation to walk in the promise of the newness of His Life begins As the New Testament confirms, baptism is more than a mere historical event or dip in the pool. Instead, Baptism begins our inspired return to Paradise.

Those knowingly and openly refusing the Word of our Lord
regarding being baptized, need to fear condemnation (see Mark 16:16).

Two things for certain: Who are we to challenge the words Jesus gave to us through John the Baptist; to deny what He Himself did, for our sake. Second, the Lord's Baptism is absolutely essential in our gaining a meaningful insight into Pascha, Ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, and the Light of Transfiguration.

Thus let us freely and with reverence, accept His call to Baptism, so that through faith, His Baptism may become our baptism. Not because He needed it, but to fulfill all righteousness so we may enter into the likeness of His Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven. As believers, we need to honor baptism as a gift of life from Him; our means of entrance into the eternal mystery of the Christ and only-begotten Son of the living God the Father.

Baptism is essential. If you have comments or further questions, please call or write.

In His Hope and Peace.

Sincerely,



Paul Goetz for St. Athanasius Academy

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This faith is the guidepost to the: **OSB: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT**

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