

into union with Christ and with the benefits of His redemption. The same term (BAPTIZO) is used to express both ideas. Sometimes the external rite is spoken of as if it actually accomplished the effects of the inner baptism (even though other Scriptures negate such an idea). A good example of this is found in Acts 22:16, where Ananias says, "And now, why are you lingering? Stand up and receive baptism for yourself, and cleanse away your sins, calling upon His name."

(2) The Significance of Ritual Baptism

Ritual baptism is viewed as a sign and a seal; i.e., as signifying and certifying spiritual realities. The central spiritual reality signified by water baptism is that of union with Christ.

This union into which we have been brought by the Holy Spirit results in certain benefits. Union with Christ means union with His death and resurrection; thus regeneration. Union with Christ means the application of His blood to our sins; thus cleansing from guilt. And union with Christ means being brought into vital relationship with Christ's Body; thus entrance into the Church. All of these significances are witnessed to by the Scriptures.

(3) Mode of Ritual Baptism as related to Significance

Of the four significances of water baptism mentioned above, which mode best symbolizes these significances?

(a) Mode and Union with Christ

The Holy Spirit is the one who unites us to Christ. In Scripture He is spoken of as "coming upon", "falling upon", "being given", "being poured out upon". The mode of pouring could represent the Spirit's act of baptizing us into Christ.

(b) Mode and regeneration (cleansing from the pollution of sin)

Regeneration is spoken of as a spiritual circumcision, a spiritual resurrection, a spiritual washing. The mode of immersion could represent the putting off of the old life and the putting on of a new life. It could also represent a resurrection and a washing. The mode of pouring could represent washing from the pollution of sin.

(c) Mode and cleansing from guilt

Pouring could represent cleansing from guilt. The mode of immersion could represent a complete cleansing from the guilt of sin. The mode of sprinkling could represent cleansing from the guilt of sin and cleansing of the conscience, especially in connection with the symbolism of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.