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Conducted by  
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**“I was reading recently an article which clearly was ignoring the part played by baptism in the rebirth. The writer said that we are saved by the word and that the word is often referred to as having a cleansing effect, e.g., ‘Being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God’ (1 Pet. 1:23). Similarly, in Eph. 5–26 ‘that he might sanctify it and cleanse it (the church) with the washing of water by the word.’ In James 1:18 we read, ‘Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth ...’ Also John 15:3 ‘Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.’ Can you please comment on this?”**

The writer of the article which our Questioner refers to has done what so many other people find it convenient to do; he has taken some quotations from the Bible and presented them as ultimate truth without any reference to or explanation of other scriptures. On the one hand, one has to suppose that the writer genuinely believes what he writes; on the other hand, there may be those who for reasons best known to themselves write such things which are less than truth; in either case, what really suffers is the truth. It behoves every writer to search diligently for the truth and to present nothing less than that; this is a task which I personally am always painfully aware of every time I approach the word of God. This, I feel, the writer referred to has not done. But we shall see as we study the word itself.

I believe that we shall only establish the right relationship between the word and the rebirth and the part that baptism plays if we pursue our objective exclusively from the Bible. I believe it is a matter of:

- (a) Communication.
- (b) The relationship between Jesus and God’s word.
- (c) The identification of the Saviour, and
- (d) Obedience to the word.

### **Communication**

The gospel writer John is very explicit about one very important fact, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). Paul wrote with equal conviction that

Jesus Christ "in his time shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:14-16). Furthermore, Jesus made about the only statement of the true nature of God when he said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Consequently, if God had to communicate His message to human beings in the flesh, then He had to enshrine that message in the medium of those to whom it was addressed, and so we find John saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). That Jesus was the Word cannot be doubted because we have already quoted John as saying, "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." That Son, as we well understand was Jesus.

I think we are now in a position to say with reasonable accuracy certain things;

(i) In order to save men, God had to communicate His message to them.

(ii) Being the Eternal Spirit He couldn't be seen Himself by men, so He had to send that message by a Person; that Person was Jesus.

(iii) The communication must inevitably have been in a manner in which human beings could understand it, i.e., in words and action.

### The relationship between Jesus and God's word

It seems to me that we have to establish next a direct link between what God would have said in His message, and what in fact Jesus did say when he was here on the earth. When Jesus was with Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, they heard a voice which came out of the clouds and said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves" (John 9:7, 8). This, evidently, was God the Father speaking out of the cloud and stating quite explicitly that Jesus was the one that should be listened to. Realising this, the words of the Lord Himself as recorded by John have a greater impact; I think they should be quoted in full. "He that believeth on me believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness, And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12: 44-50). If we believe that Jesus is God's son, then any further comment that I could make on that statement would be superfluous.

Furthermore, in John 17 we find the recorded prayer of Jesus to his Father, and in that prayer Jesus says, "For I have given unto them (the disciples) the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:8). So the disciples believed Jesus to be God's Son; they believed his words, which we have seen were God's words; in fact they *were* disciples *because* they believed everything about Jesus. We shall see later what believing Jesus really means.

Yes, not only was there a direct *link* between what God would have said and what Jesus *did* say, but there was and is a direct *unity* in the Godhead; as Paul said, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Coll. 2:9).

### The identification of the Saviour

It is true to say that the word is said to cleanse, to sanctify, and to give instruction in righteousness; it is also true to say that it is the incorruptible seed, but one must never try to separate the message from the Messenger. The word and the Word are inseparable. The word cleanses because Christ cleanses; the word sanctifies because Christ sanctifies; the word is the incorruptible seed because Jesus was incorruptible. It is absolutely certain that Jesus is the Saviour; the gospel is that word which tells of Jesus," "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Take, for example, the words of Peter. When some of the disciples ceased to follow Jesus because the way was hard, Jesus said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Then Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The same Peter testified to his Lord after Jesus had ascended into heaven, and said, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11, 12).

In identifying the Saviour we also identify life in the re-birth. Jesus said unto Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The word of the gospel as revealed by God through Christ was declared by Paul to the Corinthians in these terms, "moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15: 1-4). Paul in his Roman letter irrevocably ties the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ with baptism; "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5).

Therefore, we can summate this section by saying that Jesus is identified in the word of God as Saviour; revelation is in, by, and through the word, but salvation is exclusively in Christ Jesus. If the way to God is by the word, then it is by Christ; if the truth of God is in the word, then it is in Christ; if life is in the word, then it is Christ, for Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

### Obedience to the word

I think we have said enough up to this point for us to understand that obedience to the word must be inevitably mean obedience to Christ. If we practice obedience then we are in good company, because Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10). If you want the benefit of divine fellowship, then obey Jesus and consequently you will obey God's word; Jesus said to Judas (not Iscariot), "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? I think we must accept that it is something more than mere mental assent. It is obviously important to understand this correctly because Jesus said, "for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). In Acts of Apostles we are taught that belief in Jesus entails something

more; "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). It is hardly surprising to find that this should be so because when Jesus gave instructions to the Apostles shortly before he left the earth, he said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:18-20).

In conclusion, in order to relate the purging (or cleansing) from sin which what has gone before, we need to take note of what the writer to the Hebrews says, "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (heb. 9:13-15).

Dear reader, you must accept Christ as Saviour. To whom can you go? It is Jesus who brought the message of salvation, and died so that God's word might be fulfilled in Him.