

The Third Baptism

by Mike Atnip

The third baptism, or baptism of suffering, is a necessary part of the Christian life, where a person is tested and refined through suffering to manifest God's righteous character.

Scripture: Matthew 10:38, Luke 12:50, Romans 12:21, 1 Peter 3:14, 1 Peter 4:1, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Suffering And Glory", "Christian Suffering"

Description

Mike Atnip preaches about the three baptisms in the Christian life, focusing on the often overlooked 'baptism of suffering' that Jesus spoke of in Luke 12:50. He emphasizes the importance of not replacing this baptism with a 'Prosperity Gospel' that promises material blessings, but rather following Jesus into His baptism of suffering. Atnip delves into the necessity of suffering in manifesting the righteous character of God and how believers are called to overcome evil with good, ultimately glorifying God through their responses to unjust treatment.

Transcript

I have a baptism to be baptized with ...

Luke 12:50

One could fill a library with the books that have been written about the first two baptisms. In the life of Jesus, our Perfect Example, we find Him being baptized with water by John the Baptist. In quick succession, the Holy Spirit "descend[ed] like a dove, and light[ed] upon him." It is easy to see two baptisms here; one with water, and the other with the Holy Ghost.

But further on in the Gospel story, we see Jesus commenting about a baptism that He had not yet accomplished: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"
Lu. 12:50

It was this baptism that the early Anabaptists called "the third baptism." Sometimes it was referred to as the "baptism of suffering," or "the baptism of blood." This latter term came from 1 John 5:8, which tells us, "And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

The "forgotten" baptism

This third baptism is largely ignored today. In fact, it has in some cases been replaced with a baptism that is just the opposite of suffering. By this I mean what may well be called a "baptism of blessings." This so-called "Prosperity Gospel" is what the Apostle Paul called "another gospel" in 2 Corinthians 11:4 and Galatians 1:16. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of "another spirit" and "another Jesus." So if someone comes preaching a Jesus that does not live and act like the Jesus in the four Gospels, then we need to beware. In connection with the theme of this article, we can easily deduce that whoever does not preach that the disciples of Jesus should follow their Master into His baptism of suffering, it is "another Jesus." The Jesus that Paul preached told His disciples, "he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Mt 10:38

Yet today we see preachers, famous in this world, telling people about a Jesus that offers them material prosperity. The "proof" is the preacher's \$23,000 toilet, air-conditioned doghouse, or the \$20 million dollar jet. So instead of preaching a bloody, painful baptism of suffering, a baptism of material blessings is promised to those who believe in their "Jesus."

I promise you ...

It would seem that a person who is looking for people to follow him would offer his devotees something better than a lifetime of suffering. How many political candidates would get elected if in his campaign speeches he said, "Hey, vote for me and I promise you that I will lead you into the biggest economic depression this country has seen yet!" Yet, Jesus--the Jesus of the Bible--essentially tells His followers something very close to that. "Follow Me," He told them. And then He voluntarily allowed Himself to be martyred without the least resistance--and He could have called 10,000 angels if He wanted to!

Why suffering?

One of the big causes of unbelief that people stumble over concerning the God of the Bible is the question as to how a "good God" can allow evil to happen. How can a supposedly omnipotent [All-powerful] God allow suffering and evil to continue in the world? How could He, who is stronger than Satan, have allowed him to continue for so long? How can it be that a good God allows innocent children to starve?

Those are valid questions, ones that I don't claim to be able to give a complete answer to, other than two points: 1. Man's choice to sin is the cause of evil in the world, and God allows humanity a free choice. The freedom for a man to choose unrighteousness will affect others around them. Although God sometimes does limit a man from harming others, He does not totally stop sin and its consequences from happening. 2. Suffering is necessary in this world so that the righteous character of God can be made manifest.

We will examine the second point in this article.

The beginning

When Adam chose to disobey God, God was forced to separate from Adam. Adam and his posterity were then left to the whims of their own mind and the temptations of their flesh and those of Satan. By nature--without God's Spirit within to guide and empower--humans will choose that which serves to bring them the most pleasure. This is the opposite of God's nature, which is love, the opposite of self-centeredness. Thus man's fallen state left his character opposed to God's character. Self and love cannot be mixed, just like oil and water do not mix.

When man began to follow his own ways, it was anarchy. In anarchy, every man does that which he thinks best, and this usually translates into doing what brings him the most personal gain and pleasure. So if Bob has 100 acres, but he sees Joe has 200 acres and better cows, Bob plans a midnight raid and kills Joe and takes over his land and cows.

We call that "unrighteousness" because it is not morally right, not what God's character is like. And God's character is the basis that determines if something is "righteous" or "unrighteous."

Man without God will basically act like an animal, as Ecclesiastes 3:18 tells us: "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts." So just like a wild animal will fight for its survival, killing one of its own over who gets to eat the prey, man fights and kills and strives for the mastery over his fellow man.

Righteous vs. unrighteousness

Humanity without God will be unrighteous. As their morals and integrity degrade (which is the natural course for people without God), humans will cheat and hurt and deceive even those who try to help them. Think of those men who will cheat old grandmothers out of their bank accounts and houses, even though the old lady is very kind to them. This is total unrighteousness: returning evil for good.

To limit this unrighteousness and help humanity from slipping into total degeneracy, God instituted human governments. These usually form some sort of basic guidelines to help limit the worst forms of unrighteousness, with applicable punishments for those who break the guidelines. The Law of Moses was one of these governments, albeit a special law that also had many types and shadows of the Gospel built into it.

These laws did not restore humanity to the fullness of God's nature and character, but they did try to put a harness on the worst of man's unrighteous actions. Most governments recognize that murder, stealing, and cheating are wrong and make laws to limit these evils. Basically, instead of evil for good, civil laws say evil for evil and good for good. This means that Bob should not kill Joe for his land and his cows, but if Bob does break the moral code and attack Joe, Joe is allowed to return the evil and defend himself. Most of the civil governments of this world operate on this basis, more or less. Under the threat of punishment, most men can live up to the "evil for evil" standard of righteousness. And of course, it is not hard to return good for good. If Bob invites Joe for a barbecue, Joe may well invite him for some watermelon on a hot day.

A kingdom of righteousness

Then came the kingdom of God. Jesus began the Gospel message by laying out the righteousness upon which His kingdom would operate. Of course, it would not be unrighteousness: evil for good. But, neither would it be evil for evil, good for good. It was to be a radically new kingdom. Actually, it was simply a return to God's original intent for man in the Garden of Eden. Christ's kingdom would be a kingdom based upon the heavenly concept of good for evil! Now, when Joe hears the rumor that Bob is about to attack him and take his land and cows, Joe visits Bob and blesses him.

So we see the three "levels" of righteousness:

1. Total unrighteousness: evil for good.
2. Righteousness by civil law, or human righteousness: evil for evil, good for good.

3. The righteousness of God: good for evil.

Let's look at a few issues in the light of these three levels of righteousness, starting with war. In total unrighteousness, one nation can attack another for whatever reason. In human righteousness, war is often limited to what may be called "just war": if one nation does attack another, then the attacked people have a right to fight back. In God's righteousness, when a people are attacked, they do not fight back, but even bless the attackers.

In boundary disputes, total unrighteousness may flare into a shootout if the two parties involved get into an argument. When one side has killed the other, "to the victor go the spoils." In human righteousness, boundary disputes are taken before a judge, who tries to hear both sides and make a just decision. In the kingdom of God, if one side tries to move the boundary marker illegitimately, the other lets him do so without a fight, and may even tell the offender to take double.

Back to suffering

What place does a baptism of suffering have in the kingdom of God? The answer is that suffering is the only way in which the righteousness of God can be manifested. One early Anabaptist writer even put it this way: "A man can only be made righteous through suffering." If you are like me, that little sentence will make you shake your head on the first time reading it. But after contemplation as to what he meant, I began to concur. Let me explain.

Jesus told his disciples in Luke 6:32-34 that "if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." In other words, is it really anything extra-ordinary for a man to practice human righteousness? Of course, those who do practice "evil for evil, good for good" can congratulate themselves that they are not like the totally unrighteous person who practices "evil for good." But Jesus came preaching a higher level of righteousness, the righteousness of God, the righteousness that is inherent to His holy character. He told His disciples in Matthew 5:20, "That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The righteousness that the scribes and Pharisees measured themselves with was the Mosaic law. And this law did hold men accountable to a measure of righteousness that was better than total unrighteousness. Poking out a man's eye for no reason was prohibited. But if someone poked out your eye, you had a right to poke his out: eye for eye. "Evil for evil" was okay in Moses' law, but "evil for good" was outlawed. Jesus told His followers that if they were going to enter into and live in His kingdom, they had to move beyond the "evil for evil" level of righteousness.

Jesus did not leave His disciples in the dark as to some practical applications. He took them through several points of the Mosaic law and lifted the standard up to the righteous character of God, and how that would work out in practical terms.

His disciples were a bit taken aback. At one point, they exclaimed, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry." It seems they questioned, like many people do, whether it would be possible to live up to the new standard.

The role of suffering

Let's contemplate the heavenly kingdom's standard of righteousness. Jesus said it plainly when He told His followers, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 12:21: "Overcome evil with good."

Now, here is the "big" question: how could a man practice the kingdom righteousness of "good for evil," if there were no evil in this world? If all that was in the world was good, there would be no opportunities for the character of God's righteousness to fully manifest itself. If there were no unjust (unrighteous) people in the earth, God could never manifest His full righteous character of returning "good for evil."

Obviously, we would all prefer to live in a world in which there was no unrighteousness. But when we ponder this whole point, suddenly we see the "need" for evil. If all were good, there would never be the opportunity to manifest the character of our good God in its fullness. Only when the true righteousness of God confronts evil, and overcomes it by good, can God's glory shine its brightest. One cannot suffer triumphantly if he never suffers!

And so to reveal the glory of God, God had to come into an evil place, a place where He would suffer evil, so that He could practice--make manifest--His righteous character trait of "good for evil."

Thus God came into this world through His Son Jesus to suffer, to triumph over evil by returning good to those who abused Him. His name was glorified through it all.

Made righteous through suffering

The author of Hebrews tells us that the Messiah, "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." It is a little hard for us to think of Jesus having to "learn obedience," but the author continues, saying, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

That word "perfect" can throw us into a tailspin if we are not careful. The word "perfect" in the KJV usually means "completed," or "brought to its finished state." So when Jesus passed through the final "test" of suffering, and "passed the test" by forgiving and returning a blessing on those who had unrighteously treated Him, His obedience was "perfected." He had proved that He "had what it takes" to always return good for evil. The righteous character of God within Him had triumphed over every temptation. He now had the right to become the "author of eternal salvation." In Hebrews 2:10, it is written "For it became him [was necessary for Him], for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

An analogy could be like a construction company that is looking for an experienced backhoe operator. When the applicant shows up, they may well take him out back and show him the machine that he will be operating, and say, "Fire it up and dig me a hole over there. I want to see if you can really do this."

God could have planned it somehow that Jesus just stayed in heaven, and then told everyone to believe that it was possible for a man to walk on earth in a human body without sinning. But God "proved" to the world that it was possible. He proved, through His son Jesus, that it is possible to live righteously among

unredeemed people, practicing "good for evil" and holiness. He sent Jesus, permitting great abuse to be heaped upon Him, to prove that this Jesus was capable in all circumstances to overcome the evil with good. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him," (Is. 53:10) because the Father knew the Son would overcome the evil with good. The righteous response of the Son towards the evil inflicted upon Him was a beautiful aroma in the Father's nose, qualifying Him to be the "author of eternal salvation."

The Lion of the tribe of Judah prevailed over evil, and His blood was taken from Him and sprinkled in the inner sanctuary [spirit] of dead humanity to enliven, purify, and forgive. Whosoever would look upon the victorious Son on the tree could be quickened into a new life of righteousness, by the Holy Spirit.

He suffers still

But the Messiah still suffers today ... in His body. And He still overcomes today ... in His body. He is still going through the third baptism, yet today ... in His body. His people are still being "baptized" with unrighteous deeds against them, so that the righteousness of God can manifest itself in every generation. Persecutions, banishments, lawsuits, divorces, angry words, abuse, and cursings are still heaped upon the saints.

Yes, it still pleases God to "bruise" His people with suffering, because He knows that the beautiful aroma of His righteous character--which He planted in them--will arise from the situation. Just like a crushed flower gives off a greater aroma, so God's people produce more righteousness when they are "crushed" in suffering.

God is not a sadist. He does not enjoy watching people suffer because He enjoys watching twisted faces, looks of despair, and hearing screams of pains. But it is only when we suffer that we can return good for evil. If we never pass through evil circumstances, we could never respond righteously to evil circumstances. Thus it remains the lot of God's people to suffer.

The first letter of Peter is filled with the idea of suffering, and how suffering fits into the Christian life. Although we will not look at all of that letter now, notice one phrase in 1 Peter 3:14: "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." While I would not insist that the following is what Peter meant, let us consider what may be a new way of looking at this sentence. We probably tend to think that Peter is saying that "If you did what was right and got blasted for it, rejoice." That is certainly true, and may be what Peter intended. But let's suppose that Peter means, "If God sends you into a situation where you suffer terrible, unjust treatment--just so God can have you respond with "good for evil" righteousness--rejoice!" In other words, God may allow one of your employees to embezzle \$50,000 from your business, just so that the world can see you respond like Christ would in the situation. God is "bruising" you to get a sweet odor! And we are supposed to rejoice at the opportunity!

Check this box if you would like to opt out of suffering

There are no opt-out options to the third baptism in the Christian life!

No opt-outs allowed

When a man or a woman comes to Christ to be a disciple, no alternative is given to opt out of any of the three baptisms. We definitely need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How else could we be empowered to live like Christ? We are commanded to go into the whole world, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Our flesh usually has no problem accepting baptism with water or with the Holy Ghost. But it screams in defiance at the third baptism: the baptism of a bloody suffering. There are no little boxes to check off in the "contract" of the New Covenant, that is, a little box that says, "Check here if you would like to opt out of any of the following baptisms." Entrance into the kingdom is a total surrender of the will to whatever God has in store; we don't "bargain" with God.

Jesus told us we need to count the cost before following Him. He said that we must take up the cross and follow Him. No opt-outs. As we have already seen in this article, the only way that the righteousness of the kingdom of God can manifest itself is when evil happens. Evil must happen, or we cannot overcome it with good.

So we must count the cost. If we don't want to have any suffering in our lives ... then don't even think of becoming a disciple of Jesus! It is true; God may choose some of us to have less suffering, but if we want to conquer unrighteousness, unrighteousness has to happen to us. We cannot overcome bitterness unless we experience a situation that tempts us to hold a grudge. Being treated nicely doesn't usually tempt us to bitterness, so we must needs experience treatment--a mistreatment--that isn't so nice!

Glorification through suffering

Right after Judas left the room on the night before He was crucified, Jesus told His disciples, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him." Jn 13:32

When we think of glorifying God, we often think of singing praises or testifying of the great things God has done. While this is one way to glorify God, there is a better way. That way is to manifest God's character in trying situations. Others looking on will see the righteous response and glorify the Father.

Jesus glorified the Father on the cross when He openly revealed that He had something within Him that was stronger than the terrible injustice being done to Him. [He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city ... Pr. 16:32] In return, God glorified the Son. It is recorded that when the centurion who was at the crucifixion "saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man." Lu. 23:47

Peter, preaching after Pentecost, told the crowd about the glory of the cross: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go." The glorification of Jesus happened when He was unjustly crucified and responded with forgiveness.

God will also glorify us, if we will accept the suffering in our life and respond righteously. Paul wrote that we are "joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." And in another place Paul expressed the great longing to know God. Not just know about Him, but to really know Him. And in that context, Paul speaks of the role of sufferings in his relationship with Christ, saying, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Fellowship with Christ consisted of co-suffering with Him. In his letter to Timothy, Paul states that "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." That simply means that if we will take Christ and His power with us into an unjust situation that we are put into, He will give us grace to return good for evil, thus conquering evil. If we let an evil circumstance move us to respond back with evil, evil has conquered us. But when we let Christ move us to respond to evil with good, we have conquered evil.

Destroying sin by suffering

Peter tells us in his letter, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." 1 Pe. 4:1

In 1527, the Anabaptist Leonard Schiemer wrote a letter to the church at Rattenberg, saying, "It is true, Christ's suffering destroys sin, but only if He suffers in man. For as the water does not quench my thirst unless I drink it, and as the bread does not drive away my hunger unless I eat it, even so Christ's suffering does not prevent me from sinning until He suffers in me." [1] When Jesus suffered unrighteous treatment, He "ceased from sin" by not returning evil for evil. In the same way, we can "cease from sin" when we return good for the evil done to us. In this way, sin is destroyed and conquered ... by the Christ living in us!

One favorite analogy among the early Anabaptists was that of a tree in the woods. That tree is a house; but only a potential house. Only after the tree suffers the pain of the axe and saw, turning the tree into useful boards, is the tree really a house.

And so it is with the Christian and righteousness. A child of God, birthed into a new life by a baptism of the Holy Ghost, is a fountain of righteous deeds--or like the tree in the woods, a potential fountain. It is only after the believer has been sawn and shaped by sufferings does his righteous character come to any fruitful use. In this analogy, we can now grasp how the one Anabaptist could write that we can only be made righteous through suffering. We are made righteous when God regenerates us, but that righteousness becomes tangible through our responses to unrighteous actions against us.

Fruits of righteousness

In 1536, Andres Keller wrote an anguished plea to the lords who had him imprisoned for his faith:

I hope, dear lords, that you will not act rashly against me. I say this not from deceitful motives, but because I do not want you to incriminate yourselves by doing me violence. What good is it to you to reduce me to this miserable condition? I am distressed beyond misery, I am poverty-stricken and robbed of my ability to work, beyond what I could ever overcome in my lifetime [They had tortured him so severely he didn't think he would ever heal enough to be able to work again.] I have been starved so that I cannot now eat or drink, and my body is broken. How would you like to live for five weeks with only boiled water and unflavored bread soup?

I have been lying in the darkness on straw. All this would not be possible if God had not given me an equal measure of His love. I marvel that I have not become confused or insane. I would have frozen if God had not strengthened me, for you can well imagine how a little bit of hot water will warm one. In addition to this, I suffered great torture twice from the executioner, who has ruined my hands, unless the Lord heals them. I have had enough [torture] to last me the rest of my days.

However, I know that God never forsakes me if I suffer for the sake of his word. I know full well that I have experienced with great pain the Enemy's temptations against you. May God forgive you and all the dear people who have falsely accused me before you. [2]

Did you catch the righteousness of God manifesting itself? The returning of good for evil, the blessing for cursing? Mangled for life because of false accusations, yet forgiving ... that is the righteousness of Christ coming out of suffering! That is the tree being sawn into boards to create a house.

Such poignant accounts of suffering should strike us here in North America as to how little we suffer in our time. We think it is "suffering" if we leave our lights on at Walmart and have a dead battery when we get back out to our vehicle. Or, perhaps we rip our dress on the rose bush while we pass.

Yet, I know that we all do suffer injustice in some degree. It is part and parcel of life on Earth, and it is a required part of being a disciple of Jesus. People mock us. People steal our goods. People cheat us. Friends turn their back on us. Although the Bible doesn't clearly say so, I personally believe that God purposely lines Christians up to suffer some of these things, quite on purpose, just to manifest His glory.

These are hard things to go through, but if we would just stop and consider the matter, it is the only way that we can clearly manifest the righteous character of God that He has given to us as a great, undeserved gift. And just like the tree needs some working to become useful, we must pass through suffering to produce the full righteousness of Christ.

The answer

Perhaps it will help us to look upon our future sufferings not as "trials" (which they are), but as opportunities for God to overcome evil with good. When evil is overcome by good, then the kingdom of God has come to earth. Someday, all evil will be banished forever, and the kings of God's kingdom (those who overcame evil) will be taken to a place where there will never be any more evil to conquer. What a day that will be!

But until that time, we must, as Conrad Grebel wrote to Thomas Muntzer, "be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering, and death. [We] must be tried with fire, and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest, not by killing [our] bodily enemies, but by killing [our] spiritual enemies." [3]

Jesus has told us, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!" Re. 2:10

May the grace of God take you through your third baptism! A crown awaits those who overcome! ~

[1] Walter Klassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline*, ((Kitchener, Ont, Scottdale, Pa): Herald Press, 1981), 90-91.

[2] *Ibid.*, 93.

[3] George Huntston Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, Ichthus, ((Philadelphia, PA): Westminster, 1957), 80.

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