**Fulfilling All Righteousness**

Based on [Matthew 3:13-17](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt3.13-17)

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The Baptism of Our Lord

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The cause of anxiety and stress in this life comes from guilt, shame, and fear. We feel ***guilt*** because of things that we’ve done and left undone. We feel ***shame*** because we fear others won’t love us on account of our guilt. We feel ***fear*** because we don’t know whether we will be willing or able to do the right thing in the future.

This is the work of our conscience...to make us feel guilt, shame and fear about sin. It’s not a bad thing, anymore than your ability to feel pain is bad. If you didn’t feel pain, you might not notice when your hand is on a burning hot stove to pull it away. The ability to feel ***spiritual*** pain and anxiety about evil is good. Such feelings can be excruciating, but they have a purpose. Only the hopeless and despairing will seek a remedy from God.

And God sent the remedy to our despair in his Son Jesus Christ who came ***to fulfill all righteousness***. This began at his conception and his nativity. But his ministry on earth began at his baptism. “**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”**

Fulfilling all righteousness means doing everything God commands. God commanded that Jesus be baptized by John. Why? Jesus certainly didn’t need his sins washed away.

There are many possible explanations as to why Jesus had to be baptized... As an ***anointing***, like all the kings of Israel were anointed by God’s prophets. As a ***revealing*** or epiphany of Jesus as God’s own Son. As an ***example*** for us to do likewise and receive baptism. As ***participation*** in the righteousness he has prepared for us. As a ***purification*** of the waters, to make all water on earth ritually ready for our baptism. All these explanations for Jesus Baptism are good. But the simplest answer is that ***Jesus was baptized in order to obey the Father’s plan to save the world***. That is what is meant by Jesus words “It is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.”

Because Jesus came and fulfilled all righteousness, we have a remedy for our guilt, shame, and fear. These feelings are necessary, but consciences weren’t meant to bear them forever. Just as you may accidently put your hand on a hot stove and get burned, you can only bear it a moment and pain has you pull away...***so too your conscience.*** Just as the burn will take time to heal, ***so too your conscience.***  Just as a burn may leave scars that will never go away, ***so too your conscience.***  A conscience will experience deep pain, and without a treatment and remedy, people aren’t strong enough to bear it. You have to do something. You have to cope. So people learn to ignore it’s promptings, or find ways to medicate, or to rationalize bad behaviour.

But God has prepared another, better way to cope with our guilt, shame and fear. He sent His own son to fulfill all righteousness. In this way he freed our consciences from the misery of sin. As baptized children of God, we no longer need to feel eternal guilt for the evil we’ve done, Jesus fulfilled it. We no longer need to feel ashamed in the presence of God or men, because Jesus has justified us. We no longer need to fear the evil that we may face tomorrow, because Jesus will never fail to forgive a penitent heart. St. Peter writes, “***Baptism now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.***”

Baptism is our guarantee of a clean conscience, and we are to remember it daily. Repent. Be daily mindful of your anxieties, take note of your feelings of guilt, of shame and of fear, so that you can apply the remedy of the gospel. Satan will judge you. Other people will judge you. You will judge yourself...but these judgments are of no consequence. Only God’s judgment matters. You are justified through faith in Jesus Chris; even if people don’t acknowledge it, God does.

And so--as newborn saints and holy people of God--we are called to fulfill all righteousness as well. Did Jesus need to be baptized? John said, “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?” He responds by saying that it is necessary to follow the Father’s plan.

And Jesus’ response is not “You’re right John, I don’t need to be baptized in order to love and heal people and die for them” And yet, that is a lot like the reductionist reasoning of some people today. “***I don’t need to be married in order to love my partner.***” “***I don’t need to go to church to be forgiven my sins.***” Some even say “***I don’t need to be baptized to believe in Jesus.***” These are all true in a limited sense, except they miss one thing. *Fulfilling all righteousness includes doing things God’s way, even if you don’t see the point.*

John didn’t see the point in baptizing Jesus, but he baptized him anyway because His Lord told him to. That’s what faith does. ***You are forgiven by God,*** *not so that you are free to do things your way, but* in order that you would do the Good Works He has planned for you to do. Don’t cut corners. The commands of the Lord are not burdensome, but holy. Purify your conscience with the Gospel of baptism.

***We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***