

Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

The theme throughout the New Testament is clear: Only believers are baptized. The Bible says that faith in Christ alone saves. Romans 10:9 states, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." If baptism was the final saving mechanism, then we'd be guilty of baptizing unbelievers.

Here are a few misunderstood passages:

1. Acts 2:38, "Peter said, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins' " Repentance is the key to remission (forgiveness), not baptism. Baptism identifies the believer with Christ much in the same way that circumcision identified the relationship that God had with the Old Testament saints. Circumcision did not save, believing did: "Abraham believed in the Lord, and God counted it to him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). Baptism does not save; it reflects what has already been done in the heart.

The Jews knew of John's baptism and the baptism of the Gentiles into Judaism, but not necessarily baptism in the name of Jesus. Peter was clarifying that there is a distinct difference: "Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." To be baptized "in the name of Jesus" was a radical step. Unlike today in America, it often resulted in the loss of family, association and employment. A person who was baptized was serious about their conversion. They truly understood Jesus' words, "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33).

2. Another misunderstanding is found in 1 Peter 3:21, "There

is also an antitype which now saves us—Baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God)" The "good conscience toward God" signifies that we have turned from our sins and have turned to God.

Again, I'm in no way minimizing baptism; Jesus instituted this important ordinance (cf. Matt. 28:19). If the Bible taught baptismal regeneration I would embrace it, but this teaching minimizes the sufficiency of Christ's death and it lowers God's redeeming work by adding "our" work. Instead of stating what Christ has done, salvation is link to what "we" did (got baptized).

Think this through: Is Jesus' sacrificial death enough? The answers is either "yes" or "no." Baptismal regeneration says "no," albeit subtly.

Please don't misunderstand; my heart is not to spark an argument. It's to give Christ His rightful place in salvation. If baptism is vital for salvation why did Paul say, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel"?

Where does our desire for baptism come from since unbelievers don't desire it? It comes from a right relationship with God "after" conversion. This is why I don't believe that babies need to be baptized in order to be saved. If parents want to dedicate the child as a representation of their covenant relationship with God, I applaud that.

Romans 1:18-20 tells us that the wrath of God is being revealed against all who suppress the truth. Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen so that people are without excuse. Guilt implies responsibility—"we are without excuse" because God's attributes are clearly seen; they bear witness to a Creator.

Although infants have original sin, I don't believe that they will be "without excuse." Judgment is based on what a person

does with the truth—they will be held accountable for their choice. This is why theologians such as John Piper do not believe that infants go to hell. I would have to concur. An infant is not able to respond either way to God's call. This aligns with the nature and character of God. For example, in 2 Samuel 12:23, it says that David will see his child again; a child conceived as the result of adultery.

3. Another misunderstood passage is Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Here Jesus links damnation with unbelief, not baptism. The word "believe" appears in the Book of John 43 times, with hardly a mention of baptism. If both were required for salvation both would be mentioned consistently and uniformly.

Additionally, Matthew 11:20 says, "Then [Jesus] began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done because they did not repent." And Luke 13:3 confirms, "I tell you ... unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Repentance (turning from sin and turning to God) is the key. Just ask anyone who has truly experienced God's redeeming work—they are filled with God's Spirit and love His word even before being baptized. This love for God is not a characteristic of unbelievers.

In Acts 22:16, Paul was instructed to "be baptized, and wash away [his] sins, calling on the name of the Lord." It was his repenting and "calling on the Lord" that washed away his sins, not immersion in water.

What about the thief on the cross; he wasn't baptized? What if a person turns to God minutes before a devastating car crash on the way to their baptism, or as they lay on their deathbed, or seconds before a plane crash? Are they lost eternally? Of course not. Recall Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." His finished

work on the cross was and is sufficient.

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