

Baptism Doesn't Do Any Good

Allen Webster

You've heard it. And discussed it. Perhaps even argued about it until you ran out of words and patience. But, you know, they may be on to something. Baptism does not do any good—in some cases.

For centuries, unbelievers and denominationalists have argued against the necessity and efficacy of baptism. Many see it as a useless ritual or a superstitious relic from a dark past. Others divorce it from any saving power.

Of course, baptism is a part of the Great Commission. It is explicitly stated in the accounts of Matthew (28:19) and Mark (16:16), and implicit in Luke's account (24:46-37; cf. Acts 2:38). One cannot read the Great Commission or the conversion accounts in Acts and come to any other conclusion.

When Peter preached the first Gospel sermon in Acts 2, he preached the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (2:22-35). In response to the preaching of the Gospel, the audience asked, "What shall we do?" (2:37). What was Peter's response? Let's first note what it wasn't. Peter did not say to them:

"Accept Jesus as your personal savior" . . .

"Ask Jesus to come into your heart" . . .

"Pray the sinner's prayer" . . .

"You can't do anything because that would be earning salvation"...

"You obviously believe what I have preached, and thus you are now saved based solely upon faith alone."

On the other hand, some seem to see baptism as a "cure all." To them, baptism is a magic action through which one passes which immunizes him against any danger of future spiritual disease.

The truth lies somewhere in between.

BAPTISM DOES NOT DO ANY GOOD IF IT IS NOT PRECEDED BY CORRECT UNDERSTANDING. "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8b). Scriptural baptism requires that one hear and understand that Jesus, the Son of God, died for all (John 3:16; 8:24) and that all sinners must obey Him in order to be saved (Hebrews 5:8-9). It is possible to be immersed without understanding the reasons for it. For instance, many babies are "baptized," but do not have a correct understanding, so their "baptism" does no good.

BAPTISM DOES NOT DO ANY GOOD IF IT IS NOT PRECEDED BY PROPER FAITH.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). One must believe that Jesus is Divine before his baptism is scriptural. Further, one must believe that he is lost without baptism for it to be scriptural (cf. 1 Peter 3:21). If a person does not believe he needs to be baptized and will be lost if he is not baptized, then his faith in God's plan is lacking. In the Bible, only sinners are

told to be baptized (Acts 2:36-38; 22:16), and one who is baptized just to please parents, spouses, in-laws, or friends has not been scripturally baptized.

BAPTISM DOES NOT DO ANY GOOD IF IT IS NOT PRECEDED BY TRUE

REPENTANCE. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). A person who is unwilling to change his lifestyle (repent) might as well not be baptized, because it would not do him any good. If one does not intend to quit drinking, cursing, smoking, committing adultery, or lying, why be baptized? It just makes a mockery of a sacred practice.

BAPTISM DOES NOT DO ANY GOOD IF IT IS NOT PRECEDED BY A BIBLICAL

CONFESSION. “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:36-37). Most religious people in our world do not make this confession at their baptism. Many say something like, “I believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven my sins.” Where is this found in the Bible? It is not! God said that He forgives sins at baptism (Acts 22:16), not before. If one does not make a scriptural confession prior to baptism, he has not been scripturally baptized.

BAPTISM DOES NOT DO ANY GOOD IF IT IS NOT AN IMMERSION.

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death . . .” (Romans 6:4). Many advocate that one can be baptized by sprinkling, pouring, OR immersion. The Bible does not give such options, but calls baptism a “burial” (Colossians 2:12) and shows that it requires going down into the water (Acts 8:38). The word baptism literally means “to dip, plunge, or submerge.” If one was not immersed, then his “baptism” did not do any good.

BAPTISM DOES NOT DO ANY GOOD IF IT IS NOT FOLLOWED BY FAITHFUL

CHRISTIAN LIVING. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42). Occasionally, a person is baptized and never darkens the building's door again. Some come for a time but then fall away. Others may continue to attend services, but their lives mirror the world instead of the image of Christ (cf. Romans 12:1-2). In each of these cases, baptism did not really do any good because ultimately (without repentance) they will be lost.

There is a record of some who were baptized incorrectly in God's book (Acts 19:1-6). They were told to be baptized again—correctly. Why not do so if you need to? Eternity awaits your decision. Baptism will do you good!