

## **Is Baptism A Necessity?**

My goal in this study is to examine the Scriptures to come to a conclusion on this question. There are many points upon which people agree in terms of salvation. For example, I do not know anyone who would disagree with the following:

1. One must be presented with the word of God in order to be saved because the gospel is God's power to salvation – Romans 1:16.
  - a. *Without faith it is impossible to please God* – Hebrews 11:6.
  - b. Faith is produced by hearing God's word – Romans 10:17.
2. One must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God in order to be saved – John 8:24. However, *the devils believe and tremble* (James 2:19). The one and only time the phrase *faith only* is used in the Bible is in James 2:24 and it reads, *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*. There were some who believed in Jesus, but out of fear of social consequences, they would not confess Christ (John 12:42-43).
3. One must repent of sin in order to be saved from sin – Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30-31. Repentance is defined for us by Jesus in Matthew 21:28-32. It is a change of mind that leads to a change of action.
4. One must confess their faith in Christ in order to be saved – Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10.

I have never found one person who would disagree with any of the above points. However, can any of the above be done independently in order to attain salvation? In other words, can a person be saved without faith? Can a person be saved without confession? Can a person be saved without repentance? Those who are in any way familiar with the Bible will answer, *NO!* All of the above “steps” are involved in the process of a person becoming a child of God.

The point of disagreement in the discussion of salvation is always baptism. So then, the question becomes, “Must a person be baptized in order to be saved?” Does the Bible teach this to be the case? Consider the following verses:

### **Great Commission and Baptism**

1. Matthew 28:18-20. In sending His apostles out on the Great Commission Jesus included the baptism of those who were being taught. Both the teaching and the baptizing are directly connected with the authority of Christ as stated in verse 18 – “All authority in heaven and on earth.” Also, the individuals being baptized were baptized “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” When a person is baptized, then, they are brought into a relationship with each member of the Godhead.
2. Mark 16:15-16. This is Mark's account of the Great Commission and he records that the gospel was to be preached to all men. The statement of verse 16 is in terms of a promise, not a command, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved...” The term *and* is a conjunction in the Greek language (*kai*) and it joins two terms together. The phrase in the original language literally reads, *The believing one and the baptized one will be saved*. Jesus connects both faith and baptism with salvation.

### **Book of Acts and Baptism**

1. Acts 2:38. Peter and the other apostles were preaching in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. They inform the Jews that Jesus was proven to be the Son of God by His miracles (Acts 2:22-24) and yet was rejected and crucified by the very

people He came to save (Acts 2:36). In response to this message about 3,000 Jews were cut to the heart and asked what they needed to do (Acts 2:37). Peter's commands are found in verse 38, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." As discussed above, no one disagrees that repentance is absolutely necessary in order for one to be saved from sin. However, Peter connects repentance with baptism and states that they are "for the remission of sins." Jesus stated that He shed His blood for many "for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). If Peter, an inspired apostle, connected repentance with baptism in order to have the remission of sins, who are we to separate them? This is exactly what Jesus instructed the apostles to teach when He gave them the Great Commission.

2. Acts 8:1-13 – The gospel goes to Samaria because of persecution. We are told that Philip did this and that when he there he "preached Christ to them" (Acts 8:5) and performed many miracles. We are also told that the people believed Philip as he preached (v. 12) and the recorded results are, "both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).
3. Acts 8:26-40 – The gospel goes to an Ethiopian through Philip. This Ethiopian eunuch was reading from the Old Testament (Isaiah 53) and had a question that someone needed to answer for him. All that we are told about what was said to him is, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). We are not told anything concerning the contents of his preaching, but we are told the immediate results of what was said, "Now as they went down the road they came to some water...and he baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38). There was obvious belief on part of the eunuch as well as a confession of faith (v. 37). Included in this process was baptism. There must then be a connection to a person being saved (Mark 16:16) and being baptized.
4. Acts 10:1-11:18 – The gospel goes to the Gentiles through Peter. Cornelius was a good, godly man (Acts 10:1-2) but the Bible says he needed to find Peter because "He will tell you what you must do" (Acts 10:6). This was a person who was ready "to hear all things commanded by God" (Acts 10:33). Verses 34-48 record what was said and what was *commanded* to be done....Baptism – Acts 10:47-48. If it is not necessary to salvation then why was it commanded by an apostle?
5. Acts 16:11-15 – The gospel goes to Philippi through Paul and Silas. Lydia was a worshiper of God (v. 14), had her heart opened by what she heard (v. 14), and was baptized (v. 15).
6. Acts 16:25-34 – The Philippian Jailor is baptized. He heard the gospel (v. 32), repented (seen by washing their stripes), and was baptized immediately (v. 33).
7. Acts 18:1-8 – The gospel goes to Corinth. They heard, believed, and were baptized (v. 8).
8. Acts 19:1-7 – The gospel goes to Ephesus. There were certain *disciples* who were only familiar with John's baptism. John the Baptizer pointed people to the Christ and told them to believe on Jesus, not himself. The result of hearing this: "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

#### **New Testament Epistles and Baptism**

1. Romans 6:1-4 – The Romans had died to sin. Baptism is here paralleled with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The importance of baptism is simply seen in the terminology. They had been *baptized into Christ Jesus* (v. 3). Baptism is a burial (v. 4) and then a person is raised to walk in newness of life. Newness of life does not come before one's death to sin and burial in water, but after.

2. Galatians 3:26-27 – Children of God by faith, but not faith only. Writing to Christians he states that they *are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*. How Paul? “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Paul states that a person “puts on Christ” in the act of baptism. Can a person be saved without “putting on Christ?” Also, Paul wrote that salvation is *in Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 2:10). That is, salvation is in a certain place, i.e. Christ. How does one get into Christ? Through baptism according to Paul in Galatians 3.
3. 1 Peter 3:20-21 – Noah was saved by water, too. Eight souls were saved when they got in the boat and floated on the water. In that sense Peter states that they were saved by water. So what? “There is also now an antitype which now saves us – baptism...” So was Peter wrong when he said that baptism now saves us? This was the exact same message he preached in Acts 2 to the Jews and Acts 10 to the Gentiles.

One thing that has always puzzled me is the fact that there is so much confusion and disagreement on baptism and its purpose. The Bible is very clear. You cannot argue with the word of God and win. There is either a direct link with baptism to salvation or there is not. Many religious bodies teach that one can be saved at the point of faith and be baptized at some point later. My question is this: Where in the Bible is that either taught or practiced?

If I were to begin teaching that repentance is not necessary for salvation I would be considered a false teacher. If I were to begin teaching that confession is not necessary for salvation I would be called a heretic. Why is it, then, that so many people feel that they can exclude baptism from the plan of salvation and believe that it doesn't matter to God? Remember the words of Jesus, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

I will finish this article with a very simple question: Is it possible to please God and obtain salvation offered through Christ if I do not do all that He commands?