

## Baptism – part 3

**Reading: 1 Peter 3:21** “...an antitype which now saves us – baptism....”

### **Introduction:**

In the previous two lessons on this topic, we looked briefly at;

- the nature, scope and purpose of the baptism commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:19-20**);
- we looked at what baptism achieves (along with the other requirements of conversion<sup>1</sup>);
  - that it places the person “in Christ” (**Galatians 3:27**), where all of the spiritual blessings are to be found (**Ephesians 1:3**),
  - that it presents the person as “holy and blameless” before God (**Colossians 1:22**), and,
  - that the person is no longer condemned for their sins (**Romans 8:1**), and they become a part of the Lord’s church (**Acts 2:47**), His body.
- we also saw that baptism must be administered in the right context, with the recipient doing it for the right reasons, understanding its purpose, and doing it as a response in faith that the Lord will bless them (with forgiveness – **Acts 22:16**) as He has promised (**Acts 2:38**).

However, in spite of these things being clearly shown in the scriptures, there are some in “Christendom” who do not consider baptism as a requirement for salvation. They either;

- ignore completely what the Bible says about the need for baptism, or,
- while acknowledging the baptism of the Great Commission, they claim that it is not necessary in order to be saved.

Various arguments and objections are sometimes raised to defend the above stance, with some even quoting Bible verses as supporting evidence.

In this lesson, we will consider what the scriptures have to say in response to five of the most common of these claims.

## **LESSON**

### **Some arguments raised by people who say that baptism is not necessary**

#### **1) Mark 16:16 “While it says that those who don’t believe will be condemned, it doesn’t say that those who aren’t baptised will be condemned”**

- a) Firstly, the verse starts off by saying, “*He who believes and is baptised will be saved....*”. What this part of the verse is saying is that two particular things (*i.e.* belief and baptism) are required in order to obtain a specific result (*i.e.* salvation). The word “*and*” makes each of the two parts just as important as each other, *i.e.* “belief” is required just as much as “baptism”, and “baptism” is required just as much as belief”.
  - by stating that “belief + baptism = salvation”, it is automatically implied that the absence of either “belief” or “baptism” ≠ salvation<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* hearing, believing, repentance and confession.

<sup>2</sup> The symbol ≠ means “does not equal”.

### Baptism – part 3

In the same way, **Acts 2:38** states that both repentance and baptism are required for the remission (forgiveness) of sins, *i.e.* repentance is required, and baptism is required.

- b) Secondly, with regard to “*it doesn’t say that those who aren’t baptised will be condemned*”, consider the following analogy.

I could say, “*in order for your body to obtain the sustenance it requires, you must eat food and then digest that food*”, *i.e.* two things are required - both eating and digesting<sup>3</sup>. I could then go on to say that, “*if you don’t eat, then your body will not be sustained*”. If a person doesn’t eat, then there is no point mentioning the digestion (or lack of digestion) process, because there would be no food in the body to process.

Similarly, in **Mark 16:16**, there is no point mentioning the absence of baptism, because if a person doesn’t believe, then they are not even on “first base” (**Hebrews 11:6**<sup>4</sup>). Baptism is of no benefit to the unbeliever.

## **2) John 3:16 “It says that you just need to believe to be saved, therefore baptism is un-necessary”**

Let me answer this with three points.

- a) Firstly, it is true that belief in God is important. Various passages of scripture show that belief is required and involved in the process of conversion – *e.g.* **Acts 8:12-13, 37; 16:34; 18:8**.

However, belief alone does not result in salvation. In **James 2:19** we learn that even demons (or “devils”<sup>5</sup>) believe in God<sup>6</sup>. But the fact that they believe in God does not mean that they are saved. Rather, they “*..tremble*” (**James 2:19**), because their deeds show them to be opposed to God (**1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 18:2**), and they know what will happen to them in the end (**Jude 6; Revelation 20:11-15; 21:8**).

- b) Secondly, it is important not to take verses out of context, nor to look at them in isolation. Taking verses in isolation does not give the reader the full picture. For example, **John 3:16** does not mention the need for repentance. Does that mean that repentance is not required? Passages, such as **Luke 13:3, 5** and **Acts 2:38**, show that repentance is necessary, just as **Acts 2:38** also shows that baptism is necessary.
- c) Finally, the verse does not say that “only belief” is required. It says that “*...who-ever believes in Him should not perish....*”. When you look at the whole context of conversion from the scriptures, the term, “*should not perish*” is seen to mean that “*there is no reason why the person who believes in God, and enacts on that belief, should be lost*”.

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<sup>3</sup> A person could eat food, and then vomit it all out before digestion takes place. In such a case, the body receives no sustenance.

<sup>4</sup> **Hebrews 11:6** “*.....without faith, it is impossible to please Him (i.e. God)....*”

<sup>5</sup> Strong’s Concordance of the Bible, Greek words 1140, 1142.

<sup>6</sup> For example, **Luke 4:41** “*...the demons also came out....and saying, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of God’....*”

### Baptism – part 3

Belief is of little value unless it leads to the right actions. If a person truly believes in Jesus, then that belief should motivate them to do what Jesus wants. As we have seen in previous lessons, baptism is a command spoken by the Lord Himself (**Matthew 28:19**). Peter also commanded it while speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:4, 33, 38**). It is only natural, then, as we read about the conversion of people in the book of **Acts**, that we see baptism consistently being administered – see Annex A. If anyone truly believes in Jesus, they will do what He has commanded, with the result that they should not perish, but have eternal life.

#### **3) Luke 23:39-43 “The thief on the cross was saved without baptism.”**

- a) Firstly, while Jesus was here on earth, He had the power and authority to forgive sins (**Matthew 9:2-6**). Whatever sins the thief may have committed in his life, Jesus had the right to forgive him.
- b) Secondly, the Great Commission given by Jesus, which included the command to be baptised, did not occur until after His death, burial and resurrection (**Matthew 28:18-20**). At the time of Jesus’ statement to the thief on the cross, the Old Law (or Covenant) was still in place<sup>7</sup>. The New Covenant (or Testament, or Will), would not come into effect until after the death of Jesus (**Hebrews 9:16-17**). Jesus’ statement to the thief was made before His death, while the Old Law was still valid. Baptism was not a requirement for salvation under the Old Law.

We are no longer under the Old Covenant, but are under the New (**Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-14**) – the one with baptism required.

#### **4) Ephesians 2:8-9 “Baptism is a work, and we are not saved by works.”**

The claim is made that, because we have been saved by grace and not of works, then baptism is not necessary because it is a “work”.

Firstly, it is agreed that we are saved by grace, for “...*by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified...*” (**Galatians 2:16**). In other words, we cannot earn our salvation through perfect living and “meritorious works”, because at some point we all sin (**Romans 3:23**). Ultimately, we all depend on the grace and mercy of our Heavenly Father to save us.

Now whether baptism can be considered a “work” on our part is debatable. But **Colossians 2:12** tells us that when we are baptised, it is a “...*working of God...*” that is involved, not a “meritorious work” of ourselves. From our perspective, it is an act of faith – faith in the workings of God to forgive us our sins through the blood of Jesus (**Colossians 1:19-22**).

However, even if baptism is to be considered a “work”, what does **James 2:26** say about faith and works? “...*faith without works is dead...*”. Faith alone does not save (**James 2:24**). Faith needs to be accompanied by obedience (**Hebrews 5:9; James 2:17, 20, 22**), and baptism was (and is) commanded by Jesus and the apostles (**Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48**) for a specific reason - *i.e.* forgiveness. To disobey “...*the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” is to leave oneself open to the wrath of God (**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10**).

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<sup>7</sup> Jesus had said in reference to the Law that “...*one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled...*” (**Matthew 5:17-19**).

## Baptism – part 3

### 5) “It is an insignificant act - it’s just symbolic – therefore it’s not necessary.”

This sort of argument is not new to the scriptures. In **2 Kings 5** (in the Old Testament), there is an account of a mighty soldier (called Naaman) who suffered from leprosy (vs. **1**). To cut a long story short, the man came to Elisha, a prophet of God, in order to be healed (vs. **9**). Elisha instructed him to “...go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean...” (vs. **10**). Now as you read the following verses, you see that Naaman became quite indignant. This was not the response he expected, and besides, if he had to wash in a river, why not use the rivers back home (vs. **11-12**). And so he went away in a rage.

But his servants spoke with him, telling him that if Elisha had told him to go out and do some great deed, he would have done it. So why not just submit to this simple instruction (vs. **13**). Eventually, that is what he did, and he was healed (vs. **14**).

I cannot help but wonder, if the gospel asked us to do some mighty or difficult deed in order to be saved, then how many of those who object to baptism would try to do those things. But God doesn’t ask us to do something that is difficult. He asks us to submit to the simple act of baptism.

And while baptism may be a simple act, we should never assume that simple acts are not important<sup>8</sup>. And nothing that God commands should ever be seen as “insignificant” or “un-necessary” (**Deuteronomy 6:17; 1 Samuel 15:22-23; 1 Timothy 4:13, 16; Hebrews 12:28-29**).

### **Conclusion:**

No matter how hard people may try to dismiss or ignore it, baptism is still there in the scriptures as part of the New Testament plan of salvation.

- It is a command of God (**Matthew 28:19**)
- It is for the forgiveness of sins for the penitent believer (**Acts 2:38**).
- It involves a burial and a resurrection (**Romans 6:4**).
- It is the point where we become “...clothed with Christ...” (**Galatians 3:27**).
- It is the point where the sinner is transferred from the “... power of darkness, and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love...” (**Colossians 1:13**), where all of the spiritual blessings are to be found (**Ephesians 1:3**).

### Acknowledgements:

- Spiritual Sword, “Baptism in the New Testament”, January 1994, Vol. 25, No.2
- Truth for Today, “Baptism” by Owen Olbricht, 1994

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<sup>8</sup> For example, consider the “simple” acts found in these passages, and the significance that Jesus gave to them – **Matthew 10:42; Luke 21:1-3**.

**Note:** The aim of this lesson is not to prove people wrong simply for the sake of proving people wrong. The aim of presenting this topic over the three lessons has been to teach people the truth, and part of that process can involve demonstrating from the scriptures, in as loving a manner as possible, the error of some of the beliefs surrounding baptism.

### Baptism – part 3

#### **ANNEX A Examples of New Covenant conversions**

In the book of Acts, we have an historical record of people becoming Christians in the first century. In the following table, we see examples of people being converted, *i.e.* people hearing and obeying the gospel in order to be saved. Read each of the scriptures, and note what action is *specifically* mentioned in the verses. You will notice that baptism consistently occurs.

NB: Some of the actions (not ticked) are implied from what the verses say, but this exercise is to note what actions are explicitly mentioned.

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Hear</b>	<b>Believe</b>	<b>Repent</b>	<b>Confession</b>	<b>Baptised</b>
Acts 2:36-41, 42 Jews on Pentecost	✓ 37		✓ 38		✓ 38, 41
Acts 8:5-13 People in Samaria	✓ 5	✓ 12-13			✓ 12-13
Acts 8:26-39 Ethiopian Eunuch	✓ 35	✓ 37		✓ 37	✓ 38
Acts 9:10-18 Acts 22:10-17 Saul / Paul	✓ 16				✓ 18 ✓ 16
Acts 10:24-48 Cornelius & friends	✓ 34-44				✓ 48
Acts 16:13-15 Lydia	✓ 13				✓ 15
Acts 16:25-34 Jailer	✓ 31-32	✓ 34			✓ 33
Acts 19:1-5 The Ephesians	✓ 4-5				✓ 5
Acts 18:5-8 The Corinthians	✓ 8	✓ 8			✓ 8