

ON BAPTISM

WHAT DOES THE WORD "BAPTISM" REALLY MEAN?

It comes from the Greek words, *baptizo* or *baptismos* which literally mean to "dip, immerse, sink, overwhelm or plunge."

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Only ones who have been taught and have decided on their own to become "disciples" or followers of Christ should be baptized. According to Jesus, baptism is to follow instruction. Then, once we are baptized we must continue to be taught. *See Matthew 28:19-20.*

SHOULD YOUNG CHILDREN BE BAPTIZED?

That depends. Prior to the age of twelve, most children have difficulty with abstract concepts. In order for anyone to be a proper candidate for baptism, they must:

Understand and believe in the existence of God. *See Hebrews 11:6.*

Understand that sin is rebelling against God. *See James 4:17.*

Understand that repentance – a turning away from self and sin – must accompany baptism. *See Acts 2:38.*

IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHOUT BAPTISM?

When the disciples were once confused about who could be saved, Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (*Matthew 19:26*). God is the only one capable of forgiving sin and giving His Spirit. He can do it at any time or in any way he chooses; however, the Scripture clearly associates these gifts with baptism. *See Acts 2:38; 22:16.*

DOES THAT MEAN THAT BAPTISM IS MORE THAN A "SYMBOL" OF SALVATION?

Yes. Our baptism is a connecting point with Jesus Christ. The Scripture tells us that we are "buried with Him (Christ) in baptism and raised with Him through (our) faith in the power of God, Who raised Him from the dead" (*Colossians 2:12*). It has been said that faith is the means of our salvation, but baptism is the time or occasion. *See 1 Peter 3:21.*

IS BAPTISM SOME SORT OF "WORK" AND THEREFORE A CONTRADICTION OF "GRACE"?

No. Baptism is not a human work at all. The candidate merely closes their eyes, holds their breath, and trusts another believer to lower them in water and then raise them up. In a human sense, the only work" being done is by the one doing the lowering and the raising. In a spiritual sense, the only one working is God. He has promised special blessing to those who are baptized.

Theologian Jack Cottrell has said, "There is absolutely no contradiction between grace and baptism for salvation. In fact, baptism for salvation is one of the purest expressions of grace you will ever find. Baptism is not a work of man; it is a work of God."

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE FERVENT BELIEVERS AND YET HAVE NOT BEEN IMMERSUED? ARE THEY LOST?

Once again, only God can answer ultimate questions like that. Certainly it is not our intention to even suggest that all who have not been immersed are separated from the Lord. However, neither is it our intention to suggest that those who have not been immersed have been fully responsive to the Lord. At the very least, we would encourage all who claim to be disciples of Christ to follow His command in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16 and to be baptized for the assurance of the blessings that He has promised.

IF A PERSON IS READY TO CONFESS JESUS AS HIS LORD AND REPENT OF THEIR SIN, WHEN SHOULD BAPTISM TAKE PLACE?

As soon as possible. In the New Testament there was a sense of urgency about baptism. Those who were making a commitment of life to Christ wanted to be baptized in order to begin again and to receive the blessings of salvation. For example, when Paul and Silas were asked by their jailer, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" they had an immediate response. They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household." Then they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them and the whole family was filled with joy because they had come to believe in God (*Acts 16:31-34*).

IF GOD KNOWS OUR HEARTS, ISN'T THAT ENOUGH? WHY THE EMPHASIS ON A PHYSICAL ACTION FOR SPIRITUAL RESULTS?

The two cannot be neatly separated. For example, the physical act of disobedience brought spiritual consequences in the garden. In addition, the physical birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Himself brings the great spiritual consequences to us. Why should we be surprised, then, that a physical response (such as baptism) would have great spiritual consequences (such as forgiveness of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, salvation)? Honest faith always results in appropriate action. In fact, Scripture says that faith without actions is dead (*James 2:17*).

SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT BAPTISM IS RELATED TO SALVATION?

Yes. Years ago, Alexander Campbell explained it with a simple story like this:

A ship is sinking and a father hears the cries of the men on board. He sends his son in a small boat to rescue the sailors. The son rows out and calls to the dying men, "Hold on! Grasp the oar! I will pull you into the boat!" The sailors hear. They believe the son can help them. They obey his instructions and grasp the oar held by him. They are saved.

Now, what saved the men? The father who saw and had mercy? The instructions from the son? The son's willingness to go? The small boat? The shouts? The oars? The belief of the men? The grasping? What could you leave out? Obviously all had some part in their salvation. Even so, we do not want to minimize or exclude anything that God has associated with our salvation.

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