

The Doctrine Of Baptism

Baptism is a doctrine that permeates the New Testament. Some form of the word “baptism” is found 99 times in the New Testament. Yet, few aspects of the gospel are more misunderstood and misrepresented than baptism. A cursory examination of different religious groups will prove this point. The “religious” world would have us believe that baptism applies to infants all the way to “proxy” baptisms for the dead! That sounds kind of confusing to me, does it you? One does not have to stay in the dark about this crucial topic. The Bible sufficiently reveals God’s plan for baptism.

The foremost aspect of baptism is that it saves. First Peter 3:21 says, “And corresponding that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism saves because it washes away our sins (Acts 22:16). Without this washing of our sins, salvation would be impossible. The Old Law did not provide for full forgiveness and remission of sins (Hebrews 10:1; 9:13-14). Something more was needed. Mark 16:16 adds, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who disbelieved shall be condemned.” The Bible shows that in order to be saved, one must be baptized.

The word “baptize” implies a complete immersion or a complete burial in water. When the eunuch was baptized in Acts 8, the Bible records that both he and Philip “went down in the water,” and that they “came up out of the water.” The practices of sprinkling and pouring did not originate until several hundred years after the church was established. Early Christians understood and practiced complete immersion for remission of sins.

Many religious groups believe that baptism is not a necessity for salvation. Nowhere in the New Testament is it declared that baptism is a symbol, token, type, figure, outward sign, optional, unessential, unnecessary, or a physical action alone. The Bible reveals the true message. In the book of Acts, there are nine instances of conversion: Pentecost (Acts 2), Samaria (Acts 8), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Saul (Acts 9), Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia (Acts 16), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), the Corinthians (Acts 18), and the Ephesians (Acts 19). Notice that in each one of these instances, baptism is mentioned. But also, in every case where salvation is mentioned, baptism is always mentioned first!

It is a tragic error to suppose that baptism in any true sense whatsoever is accomplished without the existence of the prior conditions of faith, repentance, and confession. That is what Jesus meant in Mark 16:16. Baptism as a compliance with redemption in Christ is never accomplished without the prior conditions of faith and repentance existing in the believer’s heart before he is baptized. We hear the phrase “born again” thrown around a lot today (cp. John 3:3). Conversion to Christ is a lot like a birth. Natural birth begins with conception and continues until the completion of the birth process in the delivery. Spiritual birth starts with faith and continues through repentance being finally completed in the “bringing forth” in baptism (1 Peter 1:23). The new spiritual birth is no more complete without a baptism than the natural birth is complete without a delivery.

Remember, if you think it does not make any difference if you're baptized, ask yourself if it makes any difference if your sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38), your sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), or you're saved or lost (Mark 16:16). If being right with God means anything to you, then a careful study of God's word will reveal that His plan includes baptism for remission of sins. God says that remission is the only pathway to eternal life. Without forgiveness of sins, we are a people who have "no hope" (Ephesians 2:12).

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