

## BAPTISM: TOO SIMPLE TO MISUNDERSTAND!

It is amazing to observe the ways in which a simple Bible principle can be complicated---and even contradicted---by human teachings. Few Bible principles have been more distorted than the teachings about baptism. There are various reasons why these distortions have occurred, but this study will deal with the *very* simple truth.

### THE BASIC QUESTION

The basic question is this: is baptism a part of the process by which a person *becomes* saved....or is it something that occurs *after* one is saved? Surely a person wanting to become saved would be *most* interested in knowing what the Lord's will is in this matter! Most Protestants teach that baptism occurs *after* one has been saved. The following discussion is designed to answer this question in a very simple, unmistakable manner. Hopefully the reader will cast aside any preconceptions he may have and be able to see what the Bible truth is.

### WHAT JESUS SAID

Jesus spent more than three years teaching and training his apostles to carry on his work after he was back in heaven. Before he left them, Jesus told his apostles to go into all the world and preach the good news (gospel). Then he said, "...whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...". If a person wants to know what Jesus wants him to do to be saved...and he reads these words...what do you suppose he might think he should do in order to be saved??? Might he conclude that perhaps he should believe *and* be baptized in order to be saved? Anything complicated here?

### WHAT PETER SAID

The apostle Peter was among those who heard Jesus' instructions above. A few weeks later he became the first preacher to put Jesus' instructions into action. In Acts 2 we read of his preaching to a crowd on the day of Pentecost, a crowd including many who had earlier insisted that Jesus be crucified. Through his preaching many became believers and asked what they should do. Peter's answer was, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*". What do you suppose those listeners thought they should do in order to have their sins forgiven? Did Peter say anything to leave the impression that they could have their sins forgiven *without* baptism? If not, why should any of us get such an impression?

(Imagine this: some in the crowd reacted as follows: "I am willing to repent...but I don't believe baptism has anything to do with having my sins forgiven...so I am going to skip that for now....*maybe* later". Hard to believe? It happens all the time nowadays!)

### WHAT ANANIAS SAID

We all know that the great Apostle Paul was once the Christ-hating Saul of Tarsus, a man who was obsessed with attacking Christians. We may remember the appearance of Jesus to Saul on the road to Damascus as recorded in Acts 9 (repeated in chapter 22). When Saul asked Jesus

what he should do, Jesus did not tell him; rather he told Saul that he was to go into the city and *there* he would be told what he must do.

He went into the city....and there he was told *one* thing to do: "... be baptized and *wash your sins away*, calling on his name". Now consider: is there anything confusing or complicated about those instructions? Do you suppose Saul understood them? Do you suppose Saul may have concluded that there was a connection between baptism and *having his sins washed away* (or forgiven)? Do you suppose Saul may have been tempted to say something like: "Now wait a minute! I was saved on the road to Damascus. My sins were all forgiven right then and there. How dare you tell me that I *still* need to have my sins washed away! They are *already* washed away!"?

Strange as it may seem, such thinking is common today. Many argue that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus.

### UNDERSTANDING TERMINOLOGY

The Bible student comes to understand that the scriptures use a variety of terms and figures to describe or record what happens in conversion; that is, the transformation that occurs when one changes from being "unsaved" to being "saved". Examples are being "saved" (Matthew 28:19), having sins forgiven (Acts 2:38), having sins washed away (Acts 22:16), being "born again" (John 3:3), beginning a new life (Romans 6:4), entering Christ and being clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27), being brought into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13), and others. It is a grand transaction, and one to which every person should wish to attain. It is far too important to risk taking the words of men rather than the instructions of the Lord in deciding how one should become saved! There are no short-cuts or alternate routes to this end.

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The information provided above should be *more* than enough to convince the honest seeker of truth that baptism is a vital part of God's plan for bringing salvation....or forgiveness of sins...or the washing away of sins. But there is even *more* evidence.

Consider: In Galatians 3:27 Paul stated that the Galatians had been *baptized into* Christ. Think about it: if they were saved *before* baptism....they would have *already* been in Christ....and therefore could not be *baptized into* him.

Consider: In Romans 6:3-4 Paul compares the baptism process to the burial and resurrection of Jesus. Note that the dead body of Jesus was buried...and a live body was resurrected. In baptism a body dead in sins is buried and a body with a "new life" is raised. But if one is saved *before* baptism....his new life has *already* begun...and Paul's illustration makes no sense. (What is the point in burying a *live* body???) The same illustration is repeated in Colossians 2:12.

Consider: In reading through Acts one notes that in every single conversion the person (or persons) are baptized. NEVER are any of the people involved told to pray....nor do any of them

try to substitute prayer for obedience. Why is it so hard for people of our generation to understand this???

Consider: Peter wrote (I Peter 3:21) comparing symbolically the waters of the flood during Noah's day to baptism, saying "...this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also..." (This is the same Peter who heard what Jesus told them to do...and who commanded baptism to the Pentecost crowd...and who should know what he is talking about.) Think about it: if one is saved *before* baptism...how could baptism save him? Is he saved *twice*?

### CONCLUSIONS

It is a sad fact that there are many people who have become so indoctrinated by teachings of men that their minds are closed to the most obvious facts revealed in the Bible. But there are those whose minds are still open...at least to some degree. It is to this group that we must appeal. Hopefully the information in this article can be useful to some who are learning----or preparing to teach others.

Marion D. Owens

Lancaster, CA