

Do we need to be obedient in BAPTISM?

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*“The greatest derangement of
the human mind is to believe
because one wishes it to be so.”
-Louis Pasteur*

Moses was to take the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (Canaan). The people were thirsty in the desert, so God told Moses to strike a rock with Aaron's staff. Amazingly, water came out (Exodus 17)! The second time this miracle happened God told Moses to only speak to the rock. Moses did so, but he also struck it. God considered Moses' deviance from His plan to be unacceptable. It dishonors God when we alter his specific instructions. That is why Moses was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12). Learn from this. God's plan is better than ours, and He will not tolerate us deviating from it!

Most people struggle with the subject of baptism due to their misunderstanding of faith. Many prominent men have told us that Ephesians 2:8,9 teaches that one is saved by faith alone. It actually says, “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast.” The emphasis is on the grace of God, not on the faith of the believer. It is by God's grace that anyone could even have an opportunity to hear the Good News. It is by God's grace that anyone could even be allowed to have faith (John 6:44). To say that you could be saved by faith alone is quite arrogant. How could man, deciding to believe, save himself if God does not permit it?

James 2:14-26 explains in detail that faith without works is dead and useless. This theory of being justified by faith alone is sharply refuted by verse 24, which says, “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” Also, the faith chapter (Hebrews 11) is very clear on this. Notorious people are listed as having great faith because of their actions. If their actions did not please God, then they would not have been

listed as people of great faith.

Do works have something to do with salvation? Paul wrote “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to His good purpose.” (Philippians 1:12c, 13). By God’s grace we can have faith, and by His grace we are able to do good works. God’s mercy and our actions shape our destiny, and every little thing that occurs in our lives happens only because He tolerates it! If we could narrow salvation down to one word, it would not be faith. Consider the cross. Don’t overlook that grace.

There are many references that say that “believing” is what saves (e.g., John 3:16) and they are absolutely true. So, what is belief? Believing, scripturally, must include works or it is not the believing God expects (James 2). Still, many will argue that “believing” in the Biblical sense is simply acknowledging the one true God. Fortunately, the Bible clears this up in James 2:19, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder.” Biblical belief (or faith) must include action, and it must be attributed to the grace of God.

So, is this trying to work our way to heaven? No way! Salvation is a free gift that a person cannot earn, but God has set up a procedure with which we are not to tamper. We get offers for free gifts all the time, but it always requires some initiative on our part to receive one. Besides, since the offer of salvation is for everyone, and not all enter the kingdom, there must be some criteria for accepting it. God spells it out clearly in His Word. In fact, Jesus said that it is fitting for everyone to be immersed to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). Who are we to argue?

People say that baptism is only what God does as He gives the indwelling Holy Spirit and not anything man does. If this is the case, why did Jesus tell us to go and baptize others in the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:16-20)? John 3:5 says, “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’” Many people read this and try to separate water baptism from the blood of Christ and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, but look at

1 John 5:7,8 “For there are three that testify: The Spirit, the water and the blood: and the three are in agreement.” Is it good for man to separate what God has joined together?

Remember Acts 2? Peter preached a convicting message and many believed. In fact, they so earnestly believed that “they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter could have said, “You need not do anything more. You already believe, so your sins are now forgiven and you will receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit.” But he didn’t. Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

You might also note that the idea of praying and asking Jesus to come into your heart is absent from this text. Careful study will reveal that this concept is found nowhere in the Bible. Therefore, it is a teaching of man.

It is by God’s grace that we are saved and that cannot be denied, but what do we do to take part in that grace? Modern theology is steering away from Biblical teaching on this subject. Most denominations teach that belief in Jesus is the point in which we are forgiven of our sins. That suggests that upon faith (believing), we are in Christ. So, what does the Bible say concerning the point in which a person’s sins are forgiven? – The point in which a person is considered “saved”? I John 5 tells us the water baptism, the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus are tied together, but is there a more clear passage? Is there a verse that comes right out and says how to “put on” Christ? What is the point in which we begin our new life in Christ? Watch out! Here are some verses that spell it out clearly: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father we too may live a new life. If we have been buried with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5).¹ “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Ananias told Paul exactly how to have his sins taken away: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16).

If we are baptized into Christ’s death to live a new life and in order to be united with Him at His resurrection, what happens if we are not baptized? If we clothe ourselves with Christ by baptism, then does not being baptized mean we have not clothed ourselves with Christ? If being baptized washes our sins away, then how can we deny the essentiality of it...Although it is quite evident that baptism is the point in which we are “saved” (forgiven), some will still demand a Scripture reference that says right out that baptism is a “key” in being “saved”. Well, here it is: “...God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body, but the appeal of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by

the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 3:20b-21).

Being faced with so much overwhelming evidence, those who have followed the false doctrines that leave baptism out of the plan of salvation can either repent (change their minds) or ignore the facts. Many will simply refuse to love the truth and condemn themselves (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). They will simply close their eyes to these Scriptures and focus only on verses which appear to agree with their presupposition, *and* they will not try to harmonize the complete context of the Bible. Some will use the thief on the cross as proof that baptism is not necessary for salvation. This is a strange argument since Jesus hadn't even died yet. Hebrews 9 explains that no one was bound by the will of Christ until He died. Once Jesus died, the will was put into effect. Isolating Scripture verses without reading and harmonizing the rest of the Bible is a dangerous thing to do. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18).

Look again at John 3:5 "...No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." Some people try to say the water referred to here is amniotic fluid. Careful examination of the original language (Greek) shows that the word for plain water (*hudor*) is used here and not the word for amniotic fluid (*prophoros*). It is also quite absurd to think Christ would make natural birth a prerequisite for entering the kingdom of God. Isn't it understood that before someone has to do something they have to be born? ...Yes, simply existing is necessary, but it does not need to be stated. Common sense tells us that people who never actually exist will not enter God's kingdom. And if natural birth is a requirement, what will happen to those people who were born unnaturally (e.g., Cesarean born)? Are they condemned from the start?

People say we should separate water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but since Christ's will is in effect, the indwelling Spirit is given upon immersion in water; we must first repent and then be baptized for the purpose of receiving forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38). If we are not baptized for these things, then these things are not granted. Acts 19 tells of people that were baptized in Jesus' name, but were not baptized with the intent of receiving the Holy Spirit...So, they did not have the Spirit in them! Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot endure the rigors of Christian living. That is why many fall away and abandon their faith. They never did what the Bible says to do in order to get God's Spirit in them. There are not two baptisms (one of the Spirit and one of obedience). There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5).

In such evil times, it is quite bold to go against the flow of mainstream theology. Most denominations teach that baptism is not necessary for salvation. Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). Just because it is popular to leave out the importance of baptism does not mean it is the right thing to do. Anatole France said, “If fifty million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing.” We must follow the truth of the Bible; not the flow of denominations. It is our duty to share with those who are misguided that they must be baptized in accordance with God’s Word. Because if they are not, they are not part of Christ’s body! “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (I Corinthians 12:13a, New Revised Standard Version).

Search the Scriptures with an open mind and God will reveal to you that what I have said is true. I used to argue against the view I have now taken from more angles than we have discussed in this study. As I turned to the Bible for support, I found that it was not there. I am thankful that God was gracious enough to allow me to overcome my stubbornness and arrive at the truth. May everyone who reads this examine the Scriptures thoroughly with a yearning for the truth. If your mind is closed, do not expect enlightenment. Pray that God will guide you and He will...May the grace of God be with you. Amen.

1 The *Living Bible* words this well also.

2 heperotama is translated as “pledge” in the New International Version, but it is more accurate to use “request” or “appeal.”