



“What Baptism Will Not Do”

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Baptism is an important, yet often neglected subject in the New Testament. The Bible has much to say about baptism, and Jesus made it one of the conditions of salvation by grace through faith along with belief and repentance (**Mark 16:16**). We mention baptism a lot on this program because the Bible emphasizes it more than many preachers do today and because of the significance that baptism has in the gospel plan of salvation. But for all we can say about baptism and the role that it plays in the heart and life of the believer, there are some misconceptions about what baptism can accomplish. Because of that, I want to spend some time today talking about what baptism will NOT do.

Romans 6 is one of the most exhaustive passages in the New Testament dealing with baptism and the role it plays in our conversion to Christ. We'll take our text for today's study from this chapter.

Romans 6:3-5 “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:”

Paul says that baptism unites us with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection from the grave. The result is that we can rise from the waters of baptism through the grace of God to *walk in newness of life*. We'll briefly discuss that concept today, but I want to spend the majority of our time talking about misconceptions of baptism.

One of the plainest commandments in the New Testament is to be baptized, yet it's one of the most misunderstood and overlooked subjects in the New Testament. In the book of **Acts**, every person who came to believe and accept the gospel was immediately baptized in response. It was part of the conversion process. It did not happen months after the fact, it was not an option, nor was it merely a command for Christians to observe at some point in their Christian life. It accompanied and was part of

the process of being converted to Christ and being saved. When Jesus commissioned the twelve apostles to go to the entire world and preach the gospel to every person, He told them what to preach:

Mark 16:15-16 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Now, I often hear preachers go to great lengths to explain away those plain words of Christ. But to deny that baptism has anything whatsoever to do with a person’s salvation is to deny what Jesus said and what His apostles said on other occasions as well. Baptism is commanded of each and every person who believes on Christ and repents of sin. When Peter told those who heard him preach on the Day of Pentecost what to do to be saved, he said this:

Acts 2: 38 “...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”

That word *remission* means *forgiveness*. What could be more easily and emphatically stated? Peter said that in order for every person to receive the forgiveness of their sins, they must repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. So, baptism is every bit as essential to salvation as repentance is. If a man can be saved without being baptized according to the Lord’s instructions, then he can also be saved without repenting or turning from sins. It’s just a plain and simple as that.

The Bible lists several things that baptism accomplishes in the heart and life of the penitent believer. For example, we are taught in **Galatians 3** that baptism puts one *into Christ* or into a saving relationship with Him.

Galatians 3:26-27 “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Now, they weren’t *in Christ* before they were baptized. When someone says they’re *in Christ* before they’ve been baptized, they are disagreeing with the apostle Paul. He says that you are *baptized into Christ*. Peter tells us that baptism is the step necessary to obtaining a good conscience. In speaking of the great flood and how it separated Noah from the sin of the antediluvian age, he says that baptism is the *antitype* or *likeness* of that in the New Testament.

1 Peter 3:21 “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:”

In other words, baptism is not merely a ceremonial washing of some kind—like, for example, the ritual washings of the Old Testament. Baptism is not about washing the outside of the body. Rather, its significance is found in what it does to the inside of a man through faith. Baptism is the answer to the desire for a clean conscience before God. It is the appeal to God for a clean conscience. The resurrection of Christ means that the penitent believer can be raised to a new life, having been cleansed of his former sins in baptism. That certainly agrees with what Ananias told Saul to do. Immediately upon coming to Saul after Saul had met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Ananias told him:

Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”^a

Now, if you don't have to be baptized to be saved, you can be saved without having your sins washed away. Nobody is suggesting that the water in baptism is actually washing away sins as though they were on the outside of the body. There is no magical or mystical power in the waters of baptism. But the efficacy of baptism is found in the blood of Jesus. We are redeemed, we are saved through His blood which was shed because of His grace. However, we are redeemed by His blood and cleansed by His word when—not before, but when we, in faith, submit to the condition of baptism, which the Lord commanded.

There is much that can be said about baptism and its place in God's plan of salvation, but for all of that that can be said positively about baptism, there are also several things that baptism cannot and will not do. Let's look at some of those things in the remainder of our time together.

First, I want to stress that baptism cannot save a person who does not believe and will not repent. Baptism is worthless if it is not accompanied by, motivated by, and submitted to in faith. The act of baptism is worthless if it is not accompanied by a resolve to turn away from sin and turn to Christ. Baptism is not some magical act that mysteriously removes sins. We are regenerated at the time of baptism, but it is not the water of baptism that somehow magically or mysteriously causes that regeneration. That regeneration comes from faith in Christ at the time of or in the act of baptism, which is obedience to His word. It is a necessary and logical step of obedience that can only follow one placing their faith in the Lord and deciding to turn away from their sins in repentance.

While the Bible teaches that a person cannot be saved without baptism, it also teaches that a person cannot be saved without believing in Jesus and turning from past sins (**John 8:24, Luke 13:3**). Sometimes people try to turn the Lord's words against themselves in **Mark 16:16**. Let's look at that verse again.

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved... these two things are joined together by the word *and*. Then He says, *but he that believeth not shall be damned*. Some like to say that since Jesus did not say *he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned*, that means that baptism must not be necessary for salvation. Friends, that is not what Jesus is saying at all. He is showing the importance of faith—not the insignificance of baptism. You see, faith must always come before baptism. Otherwise, baptism avails nothing. Nobody is suggesting that baptism accomplishes something aside and apart from faith. So, Jesus is simply placing faith in the proper sequence. It should be a given that if a man does not believe, then he will have no desire to be baptized. Therefore, it was unnecessary to mention baptism in the negative reference. One man put it this way regarding the unbeliever and baptism: he wouldn't if he could, couldn't if he would, and it wouldn't do him any good if he did.

So, belief and baptism are inextricably tied together. That's one reason why infant baptism is unscriptural and invalid. Babies don't have the capacity to believe anything, much less that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, so they are not candidates for baptism. Neither is any grown person who does not believe. Being dunked in water will not magically save anyone. But when scriptural baptism is coupled with faith, it's a beautiful thing and it results in God forgiving that person's sins and it places them into Christ—all through that person's faith in Him.

Secondly, baptism does not give a person a license to sin. In fact, quite the contrary. That may seem like a rather obvious thing and you might think it absurd to even suggest that, but many people never stop to think about the fact that baptism is to mark a change of life. If a man thinks that being baptized will simply clean the slate of the past and let him go on living a sinful life, and that God will suddenly look at his sin differently because he's been baptized, that man is woefully deceived. Baptism, by its very design and nature, demands repentance of the person who is baptized. Remember what Paul said:

Romans 6:4-6 “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

So, in baptism, a man is determining that he will cease sinning and come into a new relationship with the Lord and the former things are left behind. The reason that was so significant for Paul to point out was because there were those who were misunderstanding Paul's preaching on grace. The Roman letter is a textbook on salvation by grace through faith and what that means. Paul proves that despite the sin of man, God manifested His grace to fallen man and the result is that through faith in Christ, who came to save man, we can obtain this righteousness and salvation that God in His grace offered. But the result of Paul arguing this was that some argued in turn that if our sin caused the grace of God to be shown, why not just continue in sin so that more grace could abound?

That sounds absurd to us, doesn't it? Yet, we've sort of changed the argument today to suggest that God's grace simply covers everything, and that once we're saved...well, we're all just sinners anyway, so a person is saved whether he changes his life or not. On a practical level, that's just how some people treat baptism. There are those who obey the Lord in baptism, but they don't see the need to make any changes in their lives. Friend, if you're not born again and a changed life is not the result, then baptism won't do you any good whatsoever.

Romans 6:1-4 “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

So, baptism will not save someone who does not repent, and it certainly does not give us a license to go on in sin. Rather, it calls us to give up our sin and live a new and sanctified life. If a man has been a thief, baptism needs to mark a change and he must stop stealing if baptism is to avail him anything. If a man is a philanderer or fornicator, he can be forgiven of every sin he has ever committed, but he must leave his sin behind. If it was wrong before he was baptized, it is just as wrong after he's baptized.

Thirdly, baptism will not remove the consequences of sin. I'm afraid some people might get that idea. You know, we mess up our lives through sinful living, and then some hope that baptism will turn back the hands of the clock and take away scars of the past and all of the problems that their sins caused. We need to be careful that we don't confuse the guilt of sin with the consequence of sin. The only consequence of sin that obedience to the gospel removes in this life is the spiritual penalty of death and eternal doom. It removes the penalty of sin and the power of sin. The blood of Jesus can remove any

and every sin, but it doesn't remove the consequences of sin that we reap in this life through the choices that we've made.

The wonderful thing about baptism is that we can rise up out of that watery grave a new creature and the guilt of every sin we have ever committed is gone forever. We are a new creature in Christ. But that doesn't mean that earthly consequences do not remain. The Bible teaches that *the way of transgressors is hard* (**Proverbs 13:15**). That's because sin bears bitter fruit. There is no way around the fact that there is a heavy price to pay for sin in this life.

Galatians 6:7 "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Paul didn't say he *might* reap or he *could* reap or it's *likely* he'll reap—but that he shall reap as he sows. That means it's a sure thing. God's law of the harvest is immutable: the seed of sin planted in the garden of life invariably reaps a harvest of bitter fruit. Baptism doesn't change that. Many the forgiven Christian is living with the scars of a former sinful life. The longer they lived in sin and the deeper in sin they went, the worse those scars are. Those scars take many forms, but they're there nonetheless and baptism does not remove them.

If you're looking at baptism as a way to get you out of trouble with the law or to get rid of any evidence of a sinful life, you've misunderstood the purpose of baptism. But here's the good news: despite the price tag that must be paid as a natural consequence of sin, the new beginning that salvation affords will turn the tears of sin and sorrow into pearls of wisdom, joy and gratitude that come with the knowledge of how great our sins were and how even greater the grace of God is. When David was forgiven of his awful sin, he said, **"Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm 51:13)**. Sin will leave its consequences whether you are saved or not, so why not find forgiveness and let the life of the past be a stepping stone to a life of humble service and righteousness? God's grace is sufficient even as we struggle with the thorns that sin has left behind in our earthly lives.

Fourthly, baptism will not relieve a man of further responsibility to God. I have baptized people, as other preachers have, for whom I had great hopes concerning what they might become in the Lord's church, but not knowing their hearts because they never truly yielded their lives to the Lord in the process. As Jesus one time said, they only endured for a little while then fell away (**Luke 8:13**). They went back to the world, in other words. Baptism marks a lifelong commitment to Christ and it's only the beginning of a person's responsibilities to Christ and His church. Some people feel very good about themselves because they go down and get themselves baptized, and they feel they've just settled the account with God and that's all there is to it. But that's not all there is to it. Baptism is the beginning, the pivotal point.

Colossians 3:1 "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

When do we *rise with Christ*? We've already seen that it's in baptism (**Romans 6:3-5**).

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

You see, Christianity is not just a profession to be made; it's a life to be lived. So much so that Jesus admonished us to count the cost before becoming His disciple. It is not an easy road and it certainly is not something that just consists of being baptized. Baptism marks the beginning of a new life in and for Jesus Christ and our lives belong to Him and not ourselves from that moment forward. Baptism does not relieve anyone of any further responsibility to the Lord. If you're considering obeying the Lord in baptism, I hope that you will count the cost and understand that you are committing your whole being to the Lord for the rest of your life. That's a wonderful thing to do. That's the best investment of your life, your heart, your soul, your time, your talents and your treasure that you will ever make, I promise you that. But be advised that baptism is a commitment to the Lord.

Finally, I want to say that baptism will not earn anyone their salvation. Despite the fact that baptism is a condition to salvation, it is not a meritorious work. Man cannot boast in baptism. A man earns nothing in complying with the Lord's command to be baptized. Salvation is because of, and thus by, God's grace through obedient faith.

Romans 3:24 "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:"

The Father sent Jesus to the cross because He loves us and He was motivated by that fact alone. Now, we owe our salvation to Him and ALL to Him. He paid it ALL. Only Him and only His blood were able to pay the debt that no one nor anyone else's blood was able to pay. God expects us to place our unconditional faith in His Son in order to be saved, and a part of that faith is following Christ in baptism for the remission of our sins. Such is not a work of merit, but a work of faith, a response of faith. Think about it this way: in baptism, a man isn't doing anything. He's merely yielding and submitting to something that Christ asked him to do. I like the way Paul put it:

Colossians 2:12 "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

You see, God does the work in baptism. Baptism is the way in which we put our faith in Christ to save us. We're not placing our faith in ourselves, as some allege; we're placing our faith in Christ and His power to save in baptism. Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins? If not, you need to be, and we'd be glad to help you take that great step today.

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