

IS BAPTISM ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION?

There may be no subject abused more than that of baptism. Several reasons might be given for this but none of them would justify any abuse of this command. Hence, instead of discussing abuses of it, we should examine what the Lord said about it.

One should note that The practice of baptizing was introduced by John. Because of this he was known as "John the Immerser." In the first six verses of the third chapter of Matthew we have this statement concerning him: "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'. John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.'" (Matthew 3.1-6.)

When Christ was ready to go back to God, He instructed His disciples to baptize people. Matthew and Mark give us this information. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28.19-20) He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16.15-16). John relates an incident in the life of Christ that gives us more information concerning the importance of this command in the mind of Christ. Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.'" (John 3.1-5) There is no misunderstanding of these verses in the minds of the reasonable. Only when one has a theory foreign to the scriptures to support does he try to prove this is not water baptism, and then he makes himself ridiculous with all reasonable people.

The apostles were with Jesus when he gave them the instructions to preach to every creature and baptize them. In addition to receiving this information from his lips, they were inspired by the Holy Spirit so that they would remember the instructions given by the Lord. "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14.26). Jesus said just two chapters later, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16 13). Since this is true it would be impossible for the apostles to have received any information contrary to the desires of Christ. They heard him command them to baptize people, and the Holy Spirit has brought all things to their remembrance, therefore we know their instructions in this matter will be as infallible as heaven itself. Notice some things they said about it: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one 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 2.37-38). This was not many days since he had heard the Lord say "Go teach all nations, baptizing them." In addition the Spirit had come. (Acts 2.4). So we can be as sure of these statements as we are of Christ and the Holy Spirit. This same apostle said at a later date: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when 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 pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3.18-21). "Baptism that now saves you" ... "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins." Who could find language easier to understand? Who could misunderstand this language? What honest soul could say it is not necessary to be baptized? When Paul was baptized he was told to "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22.16). He could not have misunderstood the purpose of baptism, since he had to understand in his own case in order to obey God. He said. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3-27). "Baptized into" and "have put on," are very strong statements. If they were "baptized into Christ," they were out of Christ before they were baptized. This, however, is easy to understand since Christ said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16.16). John left us a statement that is as forceful as that of the other apostles. "This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement" (1 John 5.6-8).

We believe any honest person who reads these statements from Christ and the inspired apostles will be convinced of the necessity of being baptized in order to be saved.

The Lord did not leave us to guess about **how** one is baptized any more than he did about **why** we are baptized. He said we were to be baptized **to be saved**. In just such plain language he caused Paul to tell us how it is done. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6.1-6). We have a similar statement in Col.2.12. "...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Since no other method of baptizing is even so much as mentioned in the Bible, and since we have these plain statements, there can be no confusion in the honest heart concerning how one is baptized.

Many do not realize how serious it is to fail to obey God. Paul said the Lord would "in flaming fire take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1.8). Concerning John's baptism we have this statement: "But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John" (Luke 7.30). Now if by refusing John's baptism they rejected the council of God against themselves, what about the person who **refuses** Christ's baptism? The answer is clear to all.

Yes, baptism is essential to salvation. It is as prominently displayed in the New Testament as any other command of Christ, and we cannot afford to face God without obeying him in this act. Baptism is to save. (Mark 16.16.) It is a burial. (Roman: 6.4) We are not baptized **because** we are saved. Rather, we are baptized in order **to be saved**. (1 Peter 3.27) May the Lord help us all to submit to his desires that we might receive eternal salvation from Him.

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