

Water Baptism

Written by Tim Haile

Is baptism essential for salvation? Some simply say **no**. They see baptism as nonessential and irrelevant. Others say that baptism is not essential for salvation, but that it is essential for church membership. The purpose of this tract is to demonstrate from the Scriptures that, like faith, repentance, and other requirements of the gospel, *baptism is essential to salvation* and it must be done in order for one to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Regardless of the view that one may presently hold on this or any other Bible subject, one thing is certain: no harm can come from a careful and honest consideration of what God says about the subject. Let us detach ourselves from our emotions, dismiss our prejudices, look beyond our preconceptions and focus honest minds upon the plain teaching of the Bible.

“Water Salvation” or Conditional Salvation?

Those who teach the necessity of baptism are generally charged with teaching "water salvation." The Bible tells us that Noah and his family members *"were saved by water"* (1 Peter 3:20). Was that "water salvation?" Do you suppose Noah was charged with believing in "water salvation?" And what about Naaman of old; he had to *"dip seven times in the Jordan river"* before God would cleanse him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:10,14). When he finally submitted to the Lord's request, did his cleansing constitute "water salvation?" Furthermore, the Bible tells us in Exodus 14:29-30 that God "saved Israel" from the hands of the Egyptian army by parting the Red sea and allowing Israel to pass through its midst. Was that "water salvation?" Of course not! These are merely examples of **conditional** salvation, and they just happen to be examples of God's use of water in saving men from certain destruction. To the honest Bible student, a pattern should be clearly perceivable. God often uses water in salvation.

Water Baptism

Some people agree that baptism is essential, but they deny that the baptism of the New Testament is **water** baptism. While it is true that water is not specifically mentioned in every example of baptism, it is mentioned in some. For example, Peter asked, *"Can any man forbid **water** that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."* (Acts 10:47,48). Notice that baptism "in the name of the Lord" is baptism in water. On Pentecost, Peter told convicted inquirers to *"repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins..."* (Acts 2:38). Baptism "in the name of the Lord" is baptism *in water* and *for the remission of sins*. After learning the truth about Jesus, and while driving his chariot down the road, the Ethiopian said, *"See, here is **water**. What hinders me from being baptized?"* (Acts 8:36). Verse 38 says that they both went down into the **water** and he baptized him. The apostle Peter described baptism as the antitype of the **water** salvation that saved Noah. He said that baptism cleansed the conscience. The Hebrew writer described the cleansing of an evil conscience in connection with the

washing of the body with pure *water* (Heb. 10:22). Yes, the “one baptism” of the gospel age is *water* baptism for the remission of sins!

"But You People Talk About Baptism Too Much!"

This charge is frequently made. I have observed that to the opponents of any particular subject or practice, including baptism, *any* discussion of that topic is considered *too much* discussion! In these cases, the basis of opposition is often misstated. When the truth is known and admitted, such people really object to the subject of baptism *entirely*. They do not want to discuss it or hear about it at all. This raises an important question: Should honest people have an aversion to discussing *any Bible topic*? Is not "*the sum*" of God's words "*truth*?" (see Psalm 119:160). Shouldn't we be interested in "*all of the council of God*?" (see Acts 20:27). David, a man after God's own heart, considered God's words "*precious*" (Psalm 139:17). Do you share his admiration for God's thoughts and words? I hope you do. Every professed Bible believer should accept that *all* Bible topics are worthy of our discussion and serious consideration.

Is Baptism Essential?

"John the baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). This baptism was introductory to, and later replaced with, the baptism described as baptism "*in the name of the Lord.*" Those living after Christ's death, yet "*knowing only the baptism of John*" (Acts 18:25; 19:1-5), were instructed to be "*baptized in the name of the Lord.*" According to Acts 2:38, baptism "*in the name of the Lord*" is baptism **for the remission of sins**. "Forgiveness of sins" resulting from John's baptism was based upon the future death of Christ. They were forgiven in promise. Without the future shedding of the blood of Christ, John's baptism would have been worthless. Thus his baptism, and the forgiveness that it offered penitent disciples, depended upon the coming death of Christ. In contrast, the *one baptism*, mentioned in Ephesians 4:5, is a baptism that is based upon the *reality* of Christ's death.

From this contrast we learn a valuable lesson. One might assume that if baptism *in the name of the Lord* was unessential to our salvation, then surely the baptism of John would have been even *less* essential. Right? The Bible says **NO!** This actually emphasizes the present essentiality of the Lord's baptism in our salvation. Notice the following words from Luke 7:30:

"But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John."

Was John's baptism "unessential" and "unnecessary?" Was it acceptable for people to reject that baptism? No. It was not acceptable. *Rejection of baptism amounted to a rejection of God's council!* What about baptism **in the name of the Lord**, may we reject it with impunity? As we shall see, the answer is also no.

Some Things Associated With Baptism

Baptism is no more or less important than the things that are joined to it, and associated with it. Consider the following:

Mark 16:16 says,

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

The word "and" is a conjunctive word that joins two other words. In this case, *belief* is joined to *baptism*. Whatever significance may be attached to *belief* must also be attached to *baptism*. The word "and" not only joins faith and baptism, it also joins both of these acts to salvation. If *baptism* is not essential to salvation, then neither is *belief* essential to salvation. What Jesus is telling us in this passage is that *salvation* comes as a result of faith and baptism.

How important is baptism? According to Mark 16:16, it is as important as faith and salvation!

Acts 2:38 contains Peter's response to convicted Jews. The passage says,

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Again we see the conjunctive "and," but this time the little word joins another important act with baptism. Peter told believers to *repent and be baptized*. The end result would be the "forgiveness" of sins. Remember that whatever force is attached to repentance, an equal amount of that force is attached to baptism.

How important is baptism? It is as important as repentance and forgiveness of sins!

Acts 22:16 rehearses Ananias' words to Paul at the time of his conversion. Paul was told,

"And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

This statement connects three different actions. In baptism, one "calls on the name of the Lord, and has his sins "washed away." "Faith only" advocates generally cite Acts 2:21 in support of their doctrine. Peter quoted, *"And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* Of course, this cannot mean that people are saved on the basis of *faith alone*, for Jesus plainly stated that simply "calling upon the name of the Lord" was not enough. He said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21). Thus we have the Lord's commentary on what it means to "call upon the name of the Lord." It means to believe and obey. In Paul's case, according to Acts 22:10-16, this is precisely what he did, he believed and was baptized (see Mark 16:16 again).

According to Acts 22:10-16, the whole process, beginning with teaching, and ending with immersion in water, was described as *"calling upon the name of the Lord."* This should not surprise us, for the people of Acts 2 were told to "repent and be baptized" as a part of their "calling on the name of the Lord" (cp. Acts 2:21 with 2:38).

How important is baptism? It is as important as calling upon the name of the Lord and having your sins washed away!

Romans 6:3-4 says,

{3} *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"*

{4} *"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."*

Baptism or "*immersion*" as it is so clearly defined in this passage (see also Colossians 2:12), is the act by which penitent believers are united with the death of Christ. Later, in Romans 6, Paul says "*freedom from sin*" is the result of one obeying the "*form of teaching*" to which they are committed (Romans 6:17-18). He is pointing back to the verses 3 and 4. After believing the facts of the gospel the believer practices a "form" of those facts in being baptized. This is simple. As Paul described in Romans 6:3-4, just as Christ *died*, a penitent believer dies to sin. Just as Christ was *buried*, the believer is "buried" in baptism (no *sprinkling* or *pouring* here!). And just as Christ was "*raised from the dead*," so we are raised as "new creatures" from the waters of baptism.

It should be remembered that the significance of Christ's sacrifice was in His death. Isaiah prophesied that He would "*pour out His soul unto death*" (Isaiah 53:12). In harmony with this fact, it should be noted that Christ was *already dead* when the Roman soldier took a spear and "*pierced His side*." After the soldier did this, "*blood and water*" immediately emerged from the wound (John 19:34). Friend, do you see it? Jesus shed His blood in His death, and baptism is **into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:4)**. This explains why baptism is into salvation.

How important is baptism? It is as important as Christ's cleansing blood, and His death, burial, and resurrection!

Galatians 3:26-27 says,

{26} *"For you are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*

{27} *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

The last time we read a passage conjoining *faith* and *baptism*, we focused on *salvation* as the result (Mark 16:16). In this passage the thought is the same, but it is stated differently. Here we are told that faith and baptism are the necessary conditions allowing one to "put on Christ," that is, become a Christian.

How important is baptism? It is as important as becoming a Christian!

1 Peter 3:21 plainly states the importance of Bible baptism. After discussing the fact that God saved Noah and 7 of his family members by *water*, Peter went on to say,

{21} *"And corresponding to 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."*

Peter merely reiterates our Lord's thoughts from the great commission (Mark 16:16). Salvation involves baptism. Peter tells us that just as God used water to save Noah, he uses water to save men and women today. This is not "water salvation," it is

conditional salvation.

Notice that Peter connected *baptism* with a "*good conscience.*" How can this be? The answer is provided elsewhere. While contrasting the blood of Christ with the blood of goats and bulls, Hebrews 9:14 says, "*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" Thus we learn that Christ's blood cleanses the conscience. In 1 Peter 1:22 Peter said obedience "purified the conscience," and in 3:21 he said baptism provided "the answer of a good conscience." What shall we say to these things? Once again, the answer is simple. The blood of Christ saves the penitent believer by his obedience in baptism!

How important is baptism? It is as important as having a clean conscience!

Conclusion

If time and space permitted, dozens of other passages could be cited demonstrating the importance of baptism. For purposes of your own personal study you might wish to consider Matthew 28:19-20; John 3:3-5; Acts 3:19; 8:12, 13, 26-37; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 30-33; 18:8; and 1 Corinthians 12:13. But I hope the above passages and explanations will help the reader to understand God's simple truth about baptism. Contact us if we can help. Contact information is on the back cover of this tract.

Tim Haile
timhaile@mac.com