

A Biblical Reply To Those Who Honestly Think Baptism Is Not Essential To Salvation

You say, "I do believe **Mark 16:16**. But I still contend baptism is not essential to be saved. In that verse Jesus says that 'he that believeth not shall be damned.' If we have to be baptized why didn't Jesus say 'he that doesn't believe or doesn't get baptized?'"

Reply: The word "and" between "believeth" and "is baptized" is a coordinating conjunction which, like a coupling pin between railroad cars, moves both in the same direction. Jesus couples belief with baptism. There was no need for Him to say, "He that is not baptized shall not be saved." One who does not believe will certainly not be baptized. A parallel statement is, "He that eateth and digesteth his food shall live, but he that eateth not shall die." One who does not eat will not digest any food. One who does not believe won't bother to be baptized. Jesus coupled belief and baptism in **Mark 16:16**, and what he has joined together, we dare not put asunder.
Mt:19:6

You say, "Jesus says over and over again if we believe in him and the Father we will be saved or have everlasting life (**Jn. 5:24; 6:47; 6:40; Lk. 8:12**)."

Reply: You are correct in citing what Jesus says, but proper hermeneutics (Biblical interpretation) requires that we take all of what the Bible says on a given subject. If belief alone (mental assent to Jesus' Deity as the Son of God) will save, then the devils are saved, for James says they also "believe and tremble." (**Jas. 2:19**). If mere belief that Jesus is who He claimed to be brings salvation, then the chief rulers were saved, although they refused to confess Him (**John 12:42**).

We do not discount faith in any way, but the Bible teaches that salvation by faith includes baptism for the remission of sins. (**Acts 2:38**). When Paul wrote his epistle to the churches in the region of Galatia, he made the following statement: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (**Gal. 3:26**). Remember that he is writing to Christians and states that they had become children of God "by faith in Christ Jesus." Now, notice the very next verse in which he reminds them of how they became the children of God by faith in Christ: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (**Gal. 3:27**). One is not a child of God by faith until he is "in Christ" and one is not "in Christ" until he has been baptized. It is a loving, active, obedient faith that leads one to submit to Christ in baptism. No one can be saved without either faith or baptism, but either one without the other does not save.

You say, "In **Acts 16** the Paul and Silas told the jail keeper to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course they then instructed him to be baptized and would have gone on to disciple him."

Reply: You are correct in that statement. When the jailer at Philippi asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved," they replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (**Acts 16:30-31**). Remembering that all of the Bible on a given subject must be taken before we draw a conclusion, we ask, "Why did not Paul tell him the same thing Peter told the Jews on Pentecost (**Acts 2:37-38**)? Notice the following:

1. On Pentecost, Peter preached to several thousand Jews. They were convicted of sin and cried out, "men and brethren what shall we do?" Now, there is the same question the Jailer asked, and here is the answer Peter gave: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." (**Acts 2:38**) Why the difference? Both Peter and Paul are inspired apostles so why are the inspired answers not the same? We shall see soon.

2. Now shift the scene to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. Let Paul tell his own story in **Acts 22**. He is on his way to arrest Christians in Damascus when Jesus stops him on that highway. A light shines about him and he falls to the earth. Hearing a voice saying, "Saul, Saul," he asks, "Who art thou Lord?" Jesus replies, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest," whereupon Saul asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" To this, Jesus replies, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (**Acts 9:16; 22:10**).

Saul arose and went into the city, a believing, penitent man and for three days he waited in blindness, fasting and praying, and waiting for one to come and tell him what to do. When Ananias came, he told him to "arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (**Acts 22:16**).

Why the three different answers to the same question? It can be illustrated this way: If I ask someone in my home town how far it is to Oklahoma City, they will tell me it's 115 miles. If I travel 30 miles toward Oklahoma City and ask someone else, they will tell me it's 85 miles to Oklahoma City. If I travel another 40 miles and stop to inquire about the distance to Oklahoma City, I will be told it's 45 miles. Three different answers, but all correct. The answers to my question about the distance to Oklahoma City are based upon my location along the route when I asked.

That's the same reason for the three different answers to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Those answers were given to

sinner who were at different stages in understanding the way to salvation in Christ.

Those Jews on Pentecost believed in Jesus before they asked their question. Their belief came through Peter's preaching. That's what Paul later said in **Romans 10:17**: "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." They had already passed the point of belief on the road to salvation, and needed only to "repent and be baptized" (**Acts 2:38**).

When Ananias came to Saul of Tarsus in Damascus, Saul was already a believer in Christ and was a penitent man. That's obvious from his three days of fasting and praying. He didn't need to be told to believe or repent, as he had already done so. He only needed to complete his obedience by being baptized and that's what he was told to do (**Acts 22:16**).

When the Philippian jailer asked the same question of Paul and Silas, he hadn't even begun the journey. They could not tell him to repent or be baptized because he was a heathen who knew nothing of Jesus Christ. His journey to salvation had to begin with the first step which was belief. That's why the next verse says, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." Since "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17), the jailer could not very well believe until he had the gospel preached unto him. When they preached to him "the word of the Lord," he then indicated repentance by washing their stripes and was baptized the same hour of the night.

So all these cases refer to the starting point in salvation, but the terminating point is the same — baptism. If this isn't the case, then the Bible contradicts itself and it certainly couldn't do that and be the word of God.

Summing it up, the unbeliever was told to believe. The believer was told to repent. The penitent believer was told to be baptized. Therefore, before salvation is reached all of these must be done as we advance from the first condition until the point of salvation is reached.

Christ requires faith, repentance, and baptism. (**Jn. 8:24; Lk. 13:3; Mk. 16:16**). To ignore one of these items is to ignore them all. One who is baptized but has never believed or repented cannot be saved. One who believes but refuses to be baptized cannot be saved. One who believes and is baptized but never repents of his sin cannot be saved.

You say, "Baptism is very important but it is not essential to salvation. If it is essential what becomes the focus? A physical act I must perform and not Christ's shedding of blood, death, and resurrection. Those are the essentials to salvation."

Reply: If faith is essential to salvation, what becomes the focus. Isn't that a physical act one must perform and not "Christ's shedding of

blood, death and resurrection?" What of repentance? Is that required for one to be saved? Isn't that something one performs?

Does Christ's blood cleanse those who are not in Christ? Paul says we have redemption through His blood, but that is only in Christ (**Eph. 1:7**). In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Baptism is the transitional act that puts one into Christ and into His death where His blood was shed for our sins (**Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-5**).

You are correct in saying the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are "essentials to salvation." No man could ever be saved had Christ not paid the price for our sins which God's justice demanded. That's the grace of God that reaches down to save us. But in order for that grace to be appropriated, man must reach up to God in faith. That's what Paul said in **Ephesians 2:8-10**. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9: Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We are saved by the grace of God through faith. God's grace means nothing to the person who will not believe in Christ and His atoning work, repent of his sins and be baptized into Christ to receive the benefit of that atonement. God's grace provides and man's faith appropriates the blessings of grace through obedience.

You say, "Baptism is an outward sign of what happens spiritually. It is also a command of God so all those who believe in Jesus should then be baptized. If it was immensely important to be completely immersed I believe God would have made that as clear as the way to salvation is."

Reply: There is no scripture which says "baptism is an outward sign of what happens spiritually." You correctly note that baptism is "a command of God," but you said earlier "it is not essential to salvation." Can you name other commands of God that are not essential to salvation? What of repentance? What about faith? If I can ignore one command of God as "not essential," why can I not ignore all of God's commands and still be saved?

As for God making it clear that baptism is "immensely important," **1 Peter 3:21** does exactly that. "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." Peter says "baptism doth also now save us." Who am I to argue with the inspired word of an apostle of the Lord?