**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Is Baptism Just a Neat Thing to Do?**

Usually in my discussions with religious people about salvation in Christ, our conversation will eventually find its way to the subject of baptism. The question is raised, “is baptism necessary?” The view that many religious people have of this question is that baptism is a neat thing to do, but it is not necessary. Many believe that baptism is a nice ceremony that serves as an outward demonstration that one has decided to serve Jesus and is saved, but it is not necessary for salvation. Some believe that it is a decision left up to each person to decide if they want to have this experience, but not essential. In other words, baptism is a neat thing to do, but certainly not something one has to do to be saved. They have basically relegated baptism to a state of insignificance, something you can choose to do or not do.

This attitude toward baptism stands in sharp contrast to what we find in Scripture. The Bible states specifically the purpose of baptism. Acts 2:38 says it is *“for the remission of sins.”* Acts 22:16 says that in baptism one’s sins are washed away. Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 say that we are baptized into Christ. 1 Peter 3:21 says that baptism *“now saves us.”* Reading passages like these from the Bible, we are certainly not left with the impression that baptism is just a neat thing to do – that it is some simple ceremony that we can go through if we want to. In fact these passages teach plainly that it is something we MUST DO if we want to be in Christ and be saved.

But there is something else I want us to notice that maybe we don’t talk about very often, and that is WHERE baptism appears in Scripture. I want to suggest that those who try to trivialize baptism have a problem. This subject they consider to be insignificant keeps popping up in some really important places in the Bible. Those who want to convince us that baptism is no big deal, need to take a look at some of the places in the Bible that talk about baptism. So let’s take a look at some of these places.

First of all look with me at Mark 16:16. Jesus says, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* Now let us step back and look at the larger context of this passage. In Mark chapter 15 we are told about the death of Christ and his burial in the tomb. Chapter 16 begins by telling us the story of His resurrection from the dead, and how He appeared to the His disciples after His resurrection. But what would happen next? Jesus answers that question in verse 15. He says to the apostles, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* This story of what was accomplished in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (the good news of salvation to all mankind) was to be told to the whole world. And it was His disciples who were to tell it. Jesus was giving His disciples their marching orders. Can we not agree that this is a pretty important moment? Jesus is giving His disciples their mission, the most important mission ever given. He tells them to spread the gospel to a lost and dying world, to a world that is in desperate need of this gospel. And what were they to tell them to do to be saved? Jesus says, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* If baptism is just a trivial matter, a neat thing to do but not necessary, then why does it appear here as a key part of this vital mission? Why is it listed among those things one must do to be saved? It is interesting that in Matthew’s account of the great commission Jesus mentions baptism. He told His disciples, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* (Matt. 28:18-19) For those who would treat baptism as an insignificant matter, this is a very inconvenient spot in Scripture to find it.

A second passage I want us to look at is Acts 2:38. This is a passage that plainly explains what baptism is for. It says, *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”* How can we say that baptism is not necessary for salvation when you have a Bible statement like this? But let us consider the context in which the statement is made. Acts chapter 1 begins where Matthew, Mark and Luke end their story, and that is with Jesus appearing to His apostles after His resurrection. You remember at this time He commanded His apostles to go preach the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15). In Acts 1:8 it says that Jesus said to His apostles, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (v. 8) The Holy Spirit would come upon them and guide them in their preaching. Verse 9 says, *“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”* Here Jesus ascends into heaven and sits down at the right hand of God. The apostles return to Jerusalem and wait there for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 we read that when the day of Pentecost had come the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. They begin to carry out this mission to preach the gospel to the whole world, beginning by preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem. Many of these Jews, to whom they are preaching, were the ones who had crucified Jesus a few days earlier. We have recorded a sermon of Peter’s, and he says to them that Jesus’ death was according to God’s purpose and plan, and then he proves that this Jesus, whom they had crucified, was raised from the dead, and that He is both Lord and Christ. How did the Jews respond? Verse 37 says, *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’”* It is difficult to imagine a more important moment in people’s lives, the moment they see themselves as sinners and want to know what to do. This is when Peter told them to *‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”* Again, can we agree that this is a pretty big moment? The Jews who had crucified Jesus are wanting to know what to do to be saved, and Peter, the apostle of Christ, as he is moved by the Holy Spirit gives baptism as one of the requirements for their forgiveness of sins. For those who would treat baptism as a trivial matter, this is a very inconvenient place to fine it. Why mention it now, at this important moment, if it’s really no big deal?

The third passage I want us to look at is Romans 6:1-7. In verses 3 and 4 Paul mentions baptism. But let us look at the context. Verses 1 and 2 says, *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* Paul had stated back in chapter 5:20, *“...But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.”*  Paul is saying that grace triumphs over sin. Evidently, there were those who were saying, “since grace abounds where sins abounds, let us continue in sin that grace may abound.” Paul says, *“let it not be.”* And the reason it is not to be, he says, *“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* The reason we are not to continue in sin is because we have died to sin. If we have died to sin, then we are separated from sin and must not continue in it. But how and when did we die to sin? Paul answers that question in verses 3 and 4. He says, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* Paul makes very clear that there is a death that takes place at baptism. In baptism we die to sin, and therefore, we are not to continue in sin.

In verse 7 Paul says, *“For he who has died has been freed from sin.”* This is what all of us want, to be freed from our sins. But how do we do that, that is, get free from sin? Paul says here, *“he who has died has been freed from sin.”* And so we must die to be free from sin. How do we die? We are buried with Christ through baptism into death. We die to sin when we are baptized. How then can we say that baptism is just a neat thing to do, but not necessary?

And also, for those who deny that baptism is necessary for salvation, this teaching by Paul appears in a very inconvenient place – the book of Romans. Many people who teach that baptism is not necessary teach that Romans is the place to go to prove we are saved by faith alone (without baptism). Some have used a little memory device called the Romans Road to Salvation. They argue that you can find the plan of salvation just by reading through Romans. It goes like this: 1) Romans 3:23, we are all sinners and need salvation. 2) Romans 5:8, God loves us and sent Christ to die for us. 3) Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death, but salvation is God’s free gift. 4) Romans 10:9-10, believe and confess and you will be saved. 5) Romans 10:13, call on the name of the Lord – say the sinners prayer. That is said to be the Roman Road to Salvation. But you may have noticed that this Roman Road missed some of the exits. This text in Romans 6 that speaks so plainly about how men are made free from sin is completely ignored by those who teach this version of the Roman Road. The book of Romans, a very important book that tells us about salvation by faith in Christ, teaches us that baptism is necessary.

What we have seen today is that references to baptism are found at key points in the gospel story. That tells us that baptism is not the irrelevant detail that many in the religious world make it out to be. It is an integral part of God’s plan of salvation. Now, I’m not saying that baptism is the only thing that matters, but I am saying that the Bible teaches that baptism does matter. It is not just some neat thing to do, a simple ceremony that we can go through if we want to. No, baptism is something we MUST DO if we want to be saved from our sins. To be saved, the Bible teaches that we must believe in Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of the living God, we must repent of all our sins, we must confess our faith in Christ, and we must be baptized in the name of Jesus. And then we must remain faithful until the end.

There’s only one question that remains to be answered....have I done this?

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