

O.K., Then What Is The Purpose of Baptism?

Baptism is without doubt one of the most debated biblical subject. In my thirty-plus years of preaching I have had many to dispute what the Bible has to say about baptism. I suspect that the average man (outside the church) does not believe for a moment that baptism has anything to do with going to heaven. If baptism is not for the purpose of having our sins forgiven, then what is its purpose. Many people eagerly await the opportunity to tell you what baptism doesn't do, but it is critical that we know without doubt what baptism will do.

Many denominational preachers are quick to tell us that baptism doesn't have anything to do with salvation. According to them, a person is baptized after becoming a Christian. One such preacher uses the formula in Matthew 28:18-20, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Baptism follows making a disciple. Christ commanded to go into all the world to make disciples and then we are to baptize them. It seems that what the Bible actually says is to make disciples by baptizing them. Mark's account of the charge from Jesus reads like this, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16). The disciples are those who believe and are baptized.

In Acts chapter two we have an example of disciples being made. "And Peter *said* unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). It seems that Peter settles the baptism question. The purpose for baptism is to have sins forgiven. But, that is not necessarily the case. The opponents of baptism say that a person is baptized "because" his sins are forgiven. My Bible doesn't say that. According to opponents, the Greek word that is translated "for" (KJV) or "unto" means "because of." I don't believe that for a minute and neither do the people that teach it. Jesus said, "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The exact construction and wording is used in both places. If we are to be baptized because we have already been saved (our sins forgiven), then we must conclude that Jesus died because our sins had been forgiven. Isn't it a shame that Jesus died when He didn't have to die.

I believe that everyone will agree that in order to be saved or to go to heaven, a person must be in Christ. Listen to the apostle Paul, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Is it possible for one to go to heaven out of Christ? Obviously, not. Is it possible to be in Christ without having sins forgiven? Again, we hear a resounding "No". The same thing that puts one in Christ also is what takes away sin. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16).

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