

BAPTISM IS GOD'S WORK OF GRACE

We live in a time in which there is great confusion about Christian baptism. This confusion leads to some really poor conclusions when if we would just believe the scriptures, all the confusion would disappear.

Here are some examples of statements that cause confusion.

1. "Baptism is a human work."

Answer: In actuality, baptism was not designed or commanded by man, but by Jesus Christ. It rests on His authority, not man's. See Matthew 28:18-20. By submission to the authority of Christ, man earns himself nothing. This is particularly evident when it is understood that man is receiving baptism, not "working" baptism.

2. "We don't have to be baptized to be saved, but we do have to be baptized to obey Christ."

Answer: This statement gives us the conclusion that we do not have to be obedient or submissive to Christ to be saved. Such an idea goes directly against the agreed upon concept that Christ must be accepted as Lord. We also find this statement in contradiction to Hebrews 5:9.

3. "Baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace."

Answer: This is getting closer to the truth, except that those who promote this usually say the grace is received prior to baptism whereas the scripture plainly teaches that baptism is the point of grace.

It must be clearly stated that we have no hope of earning our own salvation or paying for our own salvation. We have it clearly stated that we have not the righteousness necessary to save ourselves. Romans 3:10 declares "There is none righteous." Romans 3:23 states "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Paul in Romans also plainly states that "the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. If we accept these plain teachings, any idea that man could design a baptism or plan that would result in salvation is ludicrous. This is why Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, also says, "By grace through faith you have been saved, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Ephesians 2:8, 9

Here is the point made in the Holy Scripture. Baptism is not a human work. In receiving Christian baptism we earn nothing, but we are given freely many gifts. This makes it obvious that baptism is where God bestows grace.

What does the Word of God actually say about Christian baptism? Here is plain teaching.

Acts 2 tells us the story of a Pentecost day on which the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached for the first time. It is the day that the Kingdom of God came with power. The church was established. When people heard the Word preached by Peter they were “cut to the heart,” and asked what they should do. Peter did not respond in the typical way modern preachers do. He did not tell them to pray and make their decision known. Rather, Peter declared, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) There have been many attempts to do away with the simple truth of this passage, but it plainly says that those who repent and are baptized would receive two gifts. The first gift is remission of sins. The second is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is evident that man cannot bring about the remission of sins by his own will. Nor can man cause himself to receive the Holy Spirit. If baptism were of man’s design and work, there is no way these gifts would be given. Remission of sins and the indwelling Holy Spirit are gifts given to us by God when we receive baptism. GRACE!

In Acts 22 Paul the apostle is telling the story of his conversion to Jesus Christ. The story is first told in Acts 9 and again in Acts 26. When Paul (called Saul early in the story) was first confronted by Christ, he submitted to the Lord and was told by Jesus to go to a certain city and wait there. A Christian would be sent to him to tell what he MUST DO. (Acts 9:6) While he is waiting, he spends 3 days praying and fasting. When the Christian named Ananias arrives, he tells Paul, “Why are you tarrying? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16) Let’s first notice that he will be told what he MUST do. No option! When Ananias speaks, he will declare what Paul must do. Secondly, notice that the action of baptism must be in faith, for it was to be while calling on the name of the Lord. This should be obvious since baptism was the command of Christ. Finally, his sins will be washed away. Surely, Paul is getting into the water, but can he wash his own sins away? Who would accept that? God is the one washing away the sins, not Paul. Again, in receiving baptism, Paul is being given the grace of having his sins washed away. He couldn’t do that on his own or earn it.

In Romans 6, Paul is discussing with the Roman Christians why they should not expect grace received to be approval for them to continue in sin. His question is “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” His answer begins with “Certainly not. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer in it?” Then he begins to explain to them what had happened when they had been baptized into Christ. Here is what he says.

Vs 3 When baptized into Christ, we were baptized into His death.

Vs 4 We were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that we can walk in a new life.

Vs 5 Having been buried in the likeness of Christ’s death gives us the assurance that we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.

Vs 6 Our old man was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with and that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

- Vs 7 When we died, we were made free from sin.
Vs 8 If we died with Christ, we shall also live with Him.
Vs 14 Now that we have been baptized into Christ, we are under grace.
Vs 17,18 When we obeyed from the heart (*in faith*) the form of doctrine to which we were delivered, we were set free from sin and became a slave of righteousness.

Look at all the gifts (grace) received when we are baptized. Recognize that we would receive none of these if baptism were of human design and a human work.

In the letter to the Galatians Paul is being careful to make the distinction between justification by human works and justification by grace through faith. He even boldly tells the Galatians that if they seek to be justified by the law, they have fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:4) In chapter 3 verses 26 and 27 Paul teaches: "you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." What is very appropriate is to notice that Paul is mirroring the teaching of Jesus in Mark 16:16a. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Remember that Paul early in Galatians states that his gospel was not learned from man but that it came by revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:12. Look at the question Paul is answering. How many people have put on Christ? The answer is, "As many as have been baptized into Him." (Vs 27) When Paul is talking about "putting on Christ," he is talking about being clothed with Christ. Can we do this ourselves? Isaiah tells us that all our personal righteousness is like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6) We cannot clothe ourselves with Christ. When we in faith are baptized into Christ, God gives us the grace of clothing us with Christ. Yes, Grace again.

Now look at Colossians 2:11, 12. Here the same apostle teaches that in being baptized we are receiving a circumcision not made with hands by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. We are also buried with Christ and raised with him through faith in the working of God. This is really plain. God is working on our behalf, and His plans for our redemption are realized when we are baptized in faith. He cuts off our body of sins, buries us with Christ and raises us with Him. GRACE!

If we go back to Ephesians 2:1-10 (notice that this includes the famous "by grace you have been saved passage), Paul reminds the Ephesians that they have been made alive even though they were once dead in trespasses and sins. Paul also said that they have been made alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised up together. (vss. 1, 5, 6) What event in their Christian experience would this refer to? The answer is simple, Christian baptism. His description matches exactly what he taught in Romans 6. It is important to notice that in being made alive in Christ and rising up together in Christ, Paul says that they were being saved by grace. How could he have declared anything else since baptism is not from men and not a work of men, but the work of God?

There is still more evidence.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul is detailing lifestyles that will result in our not receiving the inheritance of the Kingdom of God. After giving his list, he says to them, “And some of you used to be like that, but you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” In what event would the Corinthians think of themselves as being washed and made pure? Certainly, it would be when they were baptized into Christ. Again, washing, sanctifying and justifying cannot be done by our own merit. GRACE.

Look at Ephesians 5:25-27. There Paul tells us that the church is to be sanctified and cleansed by the “washing of water by the word.” When would the Ephesians understand this to occur? Yes, when they were baptized into Christ. In Titus 3:3-5 Paul makes it plain that we cannot be saved by our own righteousness, but that God according to His mercy saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian who has received baptism gets this immediately and understands that in baptism we are not saving ourselves, but receiving the mercy of God. GRACE!

Revelation 1:4-6 makes the point that the washing we receive (baptism) is our being washed from our sins in the blood of Jesus. No one can dispute that this is grace in action. It also makes it plain why baptism is so important. It is place where GOD covers us with the blood of Jesus.

A final passage is I Peter 3:21. In this place Peter declares that baptism saves us, not by taking a bath, but by having the answer of a good conscience toward God. If this isn't faith in action, then nothing is. (Mark 16:16a)

We are baptized into Christ in the confidence that our God will do the following things:

1. Remit our sins.
2. Give us the indwelling Holy Spirit.
3. Wash away our sins.
4. Crucify our old man of sin.
5. Bury us with Christ.
6. Raise us with Christ into a new life.
7. Free us from slavery to sin.
8. Circumcise us by putting off our body of sin.
9. Sanctify and cleanse us.
10. Wash us in the blood of Jesus.

We repeat. **God does these things.** Doesn't that make it clear that when we are baptized into Christ, God is giving us GRACE?

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