

Questions About Baptism

Yesterday I posted the following blurb on Facebook:

Food for thought regarding baptism and “deathbed conversions”:
The necessity of being baptized as an act of faith in order to have ones sins forgiven and receive salvation as is taught in Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:21, is often rejected on emotional grounds. In response to Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:21 people make emotional arguments and appeal to the inability of baptism to save a person who is on his or her deathbed. Criticizing the preacher’s inability to baptize a person on their deathbed and thus save them is like criticizing a doctor who is not able to save the drug addict that has overdosed with medicine. The doctor didn’t make the man take the drugs that cost him his life. The doctor did not cause the addiction that resulted in death. The man chose his path knowing full well the end result. When the drug addict dies it is not the doctors fault. No matter how much the drug addict might regret his decision to do drugs in the final few minutes of life, the doctor cannot save him, and it’s not the doctors fault. In the same sense, the person who has pursued sin, practiced sin, and reveled in it all his life, constantly refusing the salvific hope of the gospel, and waits too late to receive that which can save him (baptism as an act of faith - 1 Peter 3:21, Acts 2:38), can no more blame the preacher for his lost condition than the drug addict can blame the doctor for his overdose.

Some who read the post posed the following four questions and one argument. I have responded to each question and argument at length and am sharing my answers for the benefit of anyone interested.

4 Questions and an Argument:

- 1- Was the thief on the cross in Luke 23:42-43 lost since he was not baptized?
- 2- Did Paul forget to include baptism in Romans 10:9?
- 3- Are the actions of the preacher in executing baptism required for salvation?
- 4- Does salvation come 100% by God, or does it include man’s involvement?

Argument: Baptism is a form of proclamation of faith not a part of salvation. Jesus was baptized to show His intent, to proclaim that His faith was in God. Baptism isn’t a part of the salvation process but rather the neon sign that tells everyone that you are now a child of God.

Question #1: Was the thief on the cross in Luke 23:42-43 lost since he was not baptized?

I will answer the question in three parts.

First, while Jesus was on earth, he had the power to forgive sins at any time (Matthew 9:1-6). The thief on the cross was no exception. But since Christ is no longer on earth giving individual answers, and since He has not appeared to either you or I directly, we must ask what He stated should be taught in His absence.

This brings us to the second point: In the absence of Christ, we are governed by His final will and testament – His covenant. The Hebrew writer stated, “For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.” (Hebrews 9:16-18 NKJV)

Points:

1. Jesus’ new covenant was not in force until after he died.
2. Jesus’ death was necessary that He might ratify His covenant with His blood – just as the first covenant was ratified with blood.
3. Once Jesus died, His covenant came into force, i.e. had full power.

When a person’s will comes into effect after they die, the will has all authority because it expresses the binding will of the one who wrote it. The New Testament contains the binding will of Christ that came into force after He died. While Christ was alive the New Law was not in force. Thus, the Great Commission was delivered by the Lord after His death and requires everyone to believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16). It requires that all men become disciples through baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). The commission requires that repentance and remission of sins be preached in the name of Christ (Luke 24:47). These were new commands that were not given during the days of the Thief in Luke 23:42-43. Since baptism is a New Testament command, and since the thief lived under the Old Testament (before the death of Christ – Hebrews 9:16-18), the thief did not have to be baptized.

I want to make two side points before moving on that are germane to our discussion: First, the fact that Mark 16:16 does not record the necessity of repentance while Luke 24:47 does not mean that repentance is unnecessary. Nor can we take Matthew’s failure to include belief to mean that baptism alone without faith will save. We must take the totality of Scripture to bear upon a subject rather than taking one verse to the exclusion of all others.

Secondly, when Peter preached the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, he fulfilled all that was required in the three accounts of the Great Commission. He taught that Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of the Father and had poured out the Spirit as a demonstration that He was reigning (Acts 2:32-33). When the people heard it they were cut to

the heart (convicted) because they believed the message. Their conviction prompted them to cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Rather than telling them to pray the Sinner's Prayer, Peter commanded every one of them to, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Thus faith, repentance, remission of sins, and baptism were all taught just as Christ had commanded in the Great Commission. What Jesus commanded in the Great Commission, and what Peter taught on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is what I preach today.

Question #2: Did Paul forget to include baptism in Romans 10:9?

In short, no Paul did not forget to include baptism in Romans 10:9. Romans 10:9 must be kept within context. Paul had already addressed the topic of baptism in Romans 6 and did not have to repeat himself in chapter 10. Paul's decision to not mention confession in Romans 6 does not mean that confession is excluded from the process of salvation, nor does the absence of baptism in Romans 10 exclude baptism from the process of salvation either.

In Romans 6:3-4 Paul stated,

"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."

Baptism is the point in time where we are placed in Christ (vs. 3). It is in baptism that we are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is in baptism that our old man dies and we are raised to walk in newness of life. To put it another way, new life does not begin before the burial. Our new life, like Christ's, begins when we are raised a new creature.

The fact that baptism is how we are placed in Christ is highly significant because it is in Christ that we gain access to His blood and the remission of our sins. Ephesians 1:7 states, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Prayer does not place a person in Christ. Peter did not tell the audience on the Day of Pentecost to pray. He told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. When we pair Ephesians 1:7 and Acts 2:38 with Romans 6:3, we learn that baptism is the point in time where the blood of Christ is applied to the sinner, their old man dies, they are placed in Christ, and the rise from the burial of baptism a new creature. I still preach what Paul and Peter preached.

Before I move on to the last two questions, I want to say a few more things about Romans 10:9 since you inquired about it. I do not deny that it is necessary to confess the name of Jesus in order to be saved (even though confession was not included in the Great Commission). What I

deny is that Romans 10:9 overrules or excludes what was commanded in Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, and a host of other passages.

Clearly confession is required as a part of salvation in Romans 10:9. Paul goes on to require that men call on the name of the Lord in verse 13. The question is, are confessing the name of Christ and calling on the name of the Lord the same action? To answer this question, consider two examples of conversion in the book of Acts.

In Acts 8:26, God sent Philip on a long journey to go preach to a eunuch (I will return to this point later). When Philip climbed into the chariot with the eunuch, he began where the eunuch was reading (Isaiah 52-53) and simply “preached Jesus to him.” (Acts 8:35) All Philip preached was Jesus. Yet whenever they came to some water, the eunuch asked if he could be baptized. Why? Because preaching Jesus in the New Testament necessitates preaching baptism (as has been demonstrated in the Great Commission, Acts 2:38, and Romans 6:3-4). Yet Philip refused to baptize the eunuch until he had confessed Jesus (Acts 8:37). Thus, Philip taught the same thing that Paul taught, namely that both confession and baptism were necessary for salvation. Once he was baptized, the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. I still preach what Jesus commissioned, and what Peter, Paul, and Philip taught.

Confession is indeed necessary, but is confessing Christ and calling upon the name of the Lord the same action? In Acts 9, as Saul was traveling down the road to Damascus, the Lord appeared to him and asked why he was persecuting Him. Trembling and astonished Saul declared “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6) To which Jesus replied, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Notice, something would be told him that he **MUST DO**. Why didn’t Jesus tell Saul to pray the Sinner’s Prayer? Why didn’t Jesus reassure Saul that he was already saved? Rather than being saved and rejoicing, Saul went away blind (blindness is a sign of cursing) and he both fasted for three days (Acts 9:9) and spent much time **in prayer** (Acts 9:11). Rather than saving Saul directly, Jesus sent a preacher to Saul by the name of Ananias to tell him what he **must do**.

In the parallel account, in Acts 22, notice what Ananias told Saul he must do: “‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. **And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**’ (Acts 22:13-16)

After fasting and praying for three days (Acts 9:9, 11) Saul still had sins that needed to be washed away. It was through baptism that Saul’s sins were washed away, and it was also through baptism that Saul called on the name of the Lord (the identical wording of Romans 10:13). Ananias taught the same message as Peter in Acts 2, Philip in Acts 8, Paul in Romans 6, and Jesus in the Great Commission. I still preach the same message.

I do not deny the necessity of confession, nor of calling on the name of the Lord, but both Romans 10:9 and 10:13 must be understood in harmony with the rest of Scripture.

Question #3: Are the actions of the preacher in executing baptism required for salvation?

Question #4: Does salvation come 100% by God, or does it include man's involvement?

I will try to be as straight-forward and plain as I can. Salvation is 100% of God. Man does not merit (earn) his salvation. Any man that has ever been saved in the history of the world (outside of Christ) has been saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Grace was provided by God through the sinless sacrifice and shed blood of Christ (we both agree on this I would assume). Where we may disagree is what faith includes and how we receive it.

According to Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If you back up in the immediate context to verse 14, Paul clarifies the process of *how* God has delivered His word.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:1-4-17)

In verses 14-15 Paul argued that God determined to have His word declared through the instrumentation of preachers. Though it is 100% God and His word that produce saving faith, He has delivered His message through the gospel and sent men forth to preach the word. That's why Jesus sent Philip to preach to the eunuch and Ananias to preach to Saul. It's why the apostles were sent forth on the Great Commission and why I still must preach the Gospel. Salvation is 100% by God, yet that does not deny human involvement.

Nor does faith exclude obedience. Notice what Paul says in Romans 10:16

"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

Notice how Paul uses obeyed and believed interchangeably. Those who did not obey did not believe. The reverse would also be true, in that those who believe do obey. Belief is not

mental ascent; it is faith filled obedience. Faith is a belief in God's word as demonstrated in obedience to His word. The devils believe but do not have salvific faith for they will not obey (James 2:19). Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) and "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

Salvation is 100% of God, involves human instrumentation in the spread of the Gospel, and requires man's obedience.

Argument: Baptism is a form of proclamation of faith not a part of salvation. Jesus was baptized to show His intent, to proclaim that His faith was in God. Baptism isn't a part of the salvation process but rather the neon sign that tells everyone that you are now a child of God.

If I understand the argument correctly it asserts that baptism is something saved people do to demonstrate obedience (as per Jesus), and that it is not something necessary in order to obtain salvation.

Concerning the baptism of John in Mark 1:4 the Bible states,

"John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

"For the remission of sins" is the same term used in both Matthew 26:28 when Jesus stated, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

The question is, was Jesus blood shed because sins had already been forgiven, or in order that sins might be forgiven. Also, whatever Mark 1:4 teaches about baptism and "For the remission of sins" remains true when Peter later teaches that baptism is "For the remission of sin" in Acts 2:38.

Back to John's baptism in Mark 1:4. The Bible says that it was a baptism "Of repentance and for the remission of sins." In other words, repentance was a prerequisite to baptism, just as it was later in Acts 2:38. As people came out to him to be baptized, they did so, "confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). Clearly the people were wanting to have their sins removed.

The significance of the purpose of John's baptism is seen when Mark 1:4-5 is paired with Matthew 3:13-14

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

If baptism is something saved people do to demonstrate obedience (as you believe), why did John refuse to baptize Jesus? Would Jesus not be a prime candidate for baptism as a saved person of baptism is merely an act of obedience that saved people perform?

The reason John resisted baptizing Jesus is because his baptism was, is, and always has been “for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4) and Jesus was not a sinner. John stated, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”

Jesus’ response marks his baptism as an exception to the general rule of John’s baptism. He stated, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” He commanded John to make an exception and realize that his baptism was for the fulfillment of righteousness, not the remission of sins. Jesus had to be baptized to fulfill the will of the Father so that the Father could openly declare that Jesus was His Son (John 1:31-34).

Rather than the baptism of Jesus proving that baptism is an act of obedience performed by saved people, the narrative presents baptism as necessary for salvation and Jesus as the lone exception to the rule.

Concluding Thoughts:

Having answered all the questions and arguments that were posed, I want to underscore a point that is often misunderstood and then pose some questions in return: Baptism is not something that man came up with to save themselves – it is the gracious gift of faith from a loving God. When I teach as Peter, Paul, and Christ that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) I am not teaching that through baptism a man merits his salvation. The only reason I teach baptism is because God’s Word has revealed it as an act of faith (Romans 10:17) and I have been commissioned to preach the Gospel of Christ. Baptism was designed by God as an act of humble, obedient, faith-filled submission through which God buries the old man, washes away sin, and brings about new life. I cannot grant new life, nor forgive sins, nor grant new life – and neither can any other man.

In closing I ask that the following questions be considered and answered honestly.

1. Which of the following equations accurately represents Mark 16:16?
 - a. Believe + Baptism = Salvation or
 - b. Belief= Salvation + Baptism

Clarification: I have not taught that baptism separate and apart from belief saves, but I have taught that faith without works of faith is dead (James 2:24-26).

2. What does Acts 2:38 mean when it says that baptism is “for the remission of sins”?
3. Does baptism also NOW save or NOT save according to 1 Peter 3:21? A one word answer will do.

4. Since confession is something a man must do to be saved (Romans 10:9) is salvation 100% of God, or did man's act of confession merit him salvation?

5. How can we require that man must confess Christ (do something) but not be baptized (do something)? If baptism as a condition of salvation is an act of merit, why is confession as a condition of salvation not an act of merit as well?