

A Good Feeling by Being Obedient

Bill Brinkworth

“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: 22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.” I Peter 3:21-22

The doctrine of baptism has been a subject of much debate for a long time. To a Bible believer, the issue is quite clear; one is saved and then baptized by immersion. Others abide by the unbiblical christening ceremony that Constantine encouraged when he attempted to merge paganism with Christianity by mass-christening. Some even hold that baptism washes away sins.

This verse in I Peter 3:21 may give many the impression that baptism does “save us.” However, if the context of the scripture is examined, it is clear that baptism has nothing to do with being saved from the penalty of sin.

In parentheses, verse 21 clearly states that baptism does not put away sins (“the filth of the flesh”). However, baptism gives us a good conscience toward God. It makes us feel good to do what we are told (“good conscience”). Having a “good conscience” was also brought up in the previous vs. 16.

Baptism does not save a person, but what does is obedience to God’s commandments. In Noah’s case, building the ark physically saved him and his family (I Peter 3:20). In our case, salvation is obtained by obeying God in trusting Christ’s death and resurrection (I Peter 3:21).

Before salvation, a believer has often run from obeying God and certainly did not do what God wanted him to do. After salvation, baptism is one of the first steps of obedience that a believer demonstrates to God. A believer can have a clear conscience in knowing that he is finally obeying God. He shows others, and the watching Lord, when he is baptized, he remembers Jesus died, rose again for him and Jesus is now his Saviour.

“Baptism is an outward expression of an inward faith.” — Watchman Nee

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Baptism

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One of the few ordinances commanded in the Bible is that of baptism. This one act has caused much argument, division, and even many deaths in the past. Books have been written on the subject, and serious study has been given to this subject by many.

There are three types of baptism spoken of in the New Testament. They include the baptism of the Holy Ghost, a non-water baptism dealing with Jesus’ burdens (Mat. 20:22, 23), and one where a saved person is submerged into the baptismal waters. Here are some teachings from the Bible about the third type of baptism, the baptism of one who has been spiritually born again:

☞ One should be baptized because Christ commanded it: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the*

Son, and of the Holy Ghost:”

Matthew 28:19

☞ Water baptism is symbolic of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. When it is performed for one that has his sins forgiven after trusting in Jesus’ death on the cross for the remission of his sins, it is a perfect picture of what Jesus did for him. When the one being baptized is lowered quickly into the water, it is a picture of Jesus’ death on the cross. When He is brought up out of the water, it is a picture of His resurrection. *“...we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4*

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Baptism’s Purpose

A. Hodge, 1871

Baptism signifies, seals, and conveys to one to whom he belongs. The act symbolizes “the

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☞ Baptism is not essential for salvation. In verses about salvation (as John 3:13, Romans 10:9...), baptism was never included. When the man that died on the cross with Jesus was saved, Christ said he would see him shortly in “paradise.” If baptism were required for salvation, he would not have gone there with Jesus. Also, Jesus Himself was baptized. The Saviour was certainly already going “home” and did not need the commission of an ordinance to get him there. He did it because His Father commanded Him to, as we should.

☞ Baptism was performed only on people after they were saved, sometimes almost immediately. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:41*

The Ethiopian eunuch was saved and baptized shortly thereafter: *“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest [the context was water baptism]. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God....”*

Acts 8:37-39

“Obedience to God is the most infallible evidence of sincere and supreme love for him.”
— Emmons

The jailor believed: *“And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house... And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.” Acts 8:30-33*

☞ The early churches practiced it. It was performed in Jerusalem, the desert (Acts 8:36), and Paul and members of the early church were baptized.

The Greek New Testament word for baptism is “baptizmo.” That word means “immersion.” One hundred and two times in the New Testament, that term is used. It always indicates a saved person being put down into the water and brought back up. In most instances, it was performed in a river, sea, or nearby water source.

Baptism by sprinkling with water (“christening”), rather than submerging into the water, is not mentioned in the Bible. That unscriptural practice, by some accounts, was performed as early as 150 A.D. and was widely accepted by Catholicism (by Emperor Constantine) in the early 300’s A.D. Over 100 years later, many believe sprinkling of babies was widely practiced. It is the unbiblical practice of “christening” that many religions have adopted as

“baptism” and perform even today.

The christening of babies violates the commands of God and does not portray the picture of what Christ did for them on the cross. All references to baptisms were to men and women, not infants. Not one christened baby ever knew what was happening to him and certainly did not understand that Jesus died and rose again for him, which is most important to the one being scripturally baptized. No baby ever understood that he was a sinner. If a person was christened, they should still be baptized when they get saved if they want to please the Lord.

Baptism does not add to salvation, nor does it “wash away” sins. If this were true, every rain or bath would cleanse a person from sin. It is an ordinance that shows other believers one is born-again and obedient to what God commands. It is boldly donning the uniform of a Christian as a testimony. Baptism is an early step a believer takes to show obedience and willingness to obey God’s commandments.

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washing of regeneration” and “the renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5), which unites the believer to Christ. It makes him a participant in Christ’s life and all other benefits.

“For by one Spirit are we all

baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” I Corinthians 12:13

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:27

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;” Titus 3:5

Baptism is a visible sign of our covenant to be the Lord’s. It shows others we have accepted His salvation and desire to consecrate ourselves to His service. It is a badge of our public profession, showing our willingness to be separate from the world, and our admittance into the family of believers. This badge marks us as belonging to the Lord and consequently distinguishes us from the world (I Cor. 12:13).

“A man who knows that he is saved by believing in Christ does not, when he is baptized, lift his baptism into a saving ordinance. In fact, he is the very best protester against that mistake, because he holds that he has no right to be baptized until he is saved.”

— Charles Spurgeon