

WATER BAPTISM

“What about the views of water baptism? What is so important about baptism? Is it necessary for salvation?”

Mark 16:16 seems to indicate that baptism is an essential of salvation, but Scripture context elsewhere teaches such is not true. In my opinion in the early transition period it was intended as a specific evidence of faith - telling Judaism particularly – “I have trusted and received the rejected One.” From the Epistles we learn the function now is an act of loving obedience.

The word “baptism” is used in the New Testament to describe a variety of acts or experiences. These are discussed in much detail in an Emmaus course entitled BURIED BY BAPTISM. It is my intent to discuss water baptism as an act of loving obedience, by one who is already a believer in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, by whom baptism was ordained (Matthew 28:10).

Since the Apostolic Age, baptism has been practiced by every major group of the Christian church. Three different modes of baptism have been used: ASPERSION (sprinkling); AFFUSION (pouring); and IMMERSION (dipping). The Greek word for baptism implies pouring out, on, into, dipping, submerging -- hence the three modes are dependent upon persuasion. The mode is important, but the heart condition is primary.

There are some churches which insist on baptism as a requirement of church membership, and/or as an essential for salvation. There is no Scripture to substantiate these points of view. About 150 passages of the Bible condition salvation on FAITH ALONE, versus just a few which seem to make baptism as an essential part of salvation. These few are examined in the course, BURIED BY BAPTISM.

The Bible clearly states that “SALVATION IS OF GRACE THROUGH FAITH . . . THE GIFT OF GOD . . . NOT OF WORKS” or doing (Ephesians 2:8,9). Also read Romans 1:9,10 and John 3:16,18,36, which indicate assent of mind and heart is involved. And baptism is “doing” obediently AFTER salvation.

Because of factionalism, the Apostle Paul was glad he had baptized just a few in Corinth. This grand evangelist and teacher believed in baptism, and taught it as an ordinance of Christian obedience (see Romans 6:4-6). Yet he told the Corinthians his main interest was not baptizing, but preaching the gospel of God’s grace to them that perish (1 Corinthians 1:11-13).

The gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10:44) received the Holy Spirit when they believed, which signified they belonged to Christ (Romans 8:9). After receiving the Holy Spirit, that is after being saved, they were baptized (Acts 16:25-35). A classic example of water baptism is that of the Ethiopian eunuch -- saved first, then baptized -- (not in a church but nearby water.) Read Acts 9:36-39, particularly where reference is made to “down into” and “up out of” water.

In as much as the obedience of baptism is the knowledgeable act of a believer, it follows that baptism prior to salvation is meaningless.

So it is today, the believer is saved by grace through faith. Then in acknowledgeable, loving obedience (Acts 8:12) one publicly honors our Lord in the ordinance of baptism. Being baptized after salvation signifies identification with Christ in His death, and determination to walk in newness of the Christian life (see Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:6,7).