

"FOLLOWING JESUS WITHOUT DENOMINATIONALISM" **Is Baptism A Necessary Part of The Gospel?**

INTRODUCTION

We have seen in this series that following Jesus without denominationalism begins by heeding the call of the gospel. The Lord "calls" us through His gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). As we respond to the call, the Lord Himself adds us to His church (His "called-out" group of people), not to a man-made denomination (Acts 2:41,47). We have also seen that the gospel contains commands to obey (i.e., Believe the gospel concerning Jesus Christ; Confess your faith in Jesus as Lord; Repent of your past sins; Be baptized for the remission of your sins; and Be faithful unto death. Most people will agree to all these commands with the exception of baptism. To them, baptism has nothing to do with God's plan of salvation. Therefore, to them, to teach baptism is for the remission of sins is to teach a salvation by works, not by grace. And to them, if that is not what is being taught, then how can we say that we are justified by grace through faith, and not of works? So, this raises the question, **"Is Baptism A Necessary Part of the Gospel?"** In this lesson we hope to answer that question. Observe first of all a few quotations by certain individuals none would ever question or deny that we are saved by grace through faith.

- I. THE WORDS OF AUGUSTINE, AND LUTHER** (Not members of the body of Christ)
- A. AUGUSTINE (A.D. 354-430)**
1. Referring to the efficacy of baptism, he wrote that **"the salvation of man is effected in baptism"**; also, that a person **"is baptized for the express purpose of being with Christ."** (as quoted by Jack W. Cottrell in *Baptism And The Remission of Sins*, College Press, 1990, p. 30)
 2. In regards to the necessity of baptism, he refers to the **"apostolic tradition, by which the Churches of Christ maintain it to be an inherent principle, that without baptism...it is impossible for any man to attain to salvation and everlasting life."** (ibid., p. 30)
- B. MARTIN LUTHER...**
1. In answer to the question, "What gifts or benefits does Baptism bestow?", Luther replied in his *Small Catechism*, **"It effects forgiveness of sins."**
 2. He also wrote concerning the sinner: **"Through Baptism he is bathed in the blood of Christ and is cleansed from sins."**
 3. Again, he wrote: **"To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save."** (ibid., p. 32-34)
 4. In his commentary on **Ro 6:3**, he wrote: **"Baptism has been instituted that it should lead us to the blessings (of this death) and through such death to eternal life. Therefore IT IS NECESSARY that we should be baptized into Jesus Christ and His death."** (Commentary On Romans, Kregel Publications, p. 101)

C. These Individuals Believed Strongly In Justification By Grace Through Faith, And Not Of Works (Cf. Eph. 2:8-9). How Then Could They Say Such Things About Baptism?

1. The key is to understand "who" is at work in baptism
2. Is it man, or is it God?

II. THE SAVING POWER INVOLVED IN BAPTISM

A. BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE BECAUSE IT MERITS SALVATION...

1. Most people who takes issue with baptism being necessary, or having any part of the gospel plan of salvation, initially misunderstands this point
 - a. They assume that if baptism is necessary, one is saved by meritorious works
 - b. They assume that if one is baptized for the remission of sins, one has earned their salvation
2. But they need to listen carefully to **Martin Luther**...
 - a. In response to those who would call this a kind of works-salvation, he said **"Yes, it is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work but God's."** (ibid., p. 32-34)
 - b. Again, **"Luther correctly describes the working of baptism thusly: 'How can water do such great things? It is not the water indeed that does them, but the Word of God which is in and with the water (God's giving hand), and faith which trusts such word of God in the water (man's receiving hand).'"** (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia ISBE, Page 398-99).

B. BAPTISM SAVES BECAUSE "GOD" IS AT WORK!

1. Note that Peter clearly says, **"baptism doth also now save us"** (KJV) - **1 Pet. 3:21**
2. But as observed by Luther, it is God who saves us in baptism:
 - a. He is the one at work in baptism – **Col. 2:11-13** (cf. **"the working of God" - NIV**)
 - b. Other than possessing faith in Christ and God, **MAN IS PASSIVE** in baptism
 - 1) Like a patient on an operating table, submitting to the skill of a physician to remove cancer
 - 2) So we, seeking the removal of the cancer of sin, submit to the Great Physician to cut away our sins by the blood of Christ, which He does in baptism
3. Thus, it is not the "act" of immersion that saves, though salvation occurs at that time
 - a. It is **GOD** who saves in baptism, by virtue of grace, when one believes in Christ!
 - b. But because God commands baptism, and saves us in baptism, it is proper to say with Peter: **"baptism doth also now save us"** - 1 Pet. 3:21

III. BAPTISM AS INTEGRAL TO THE GOSPEL

A. ONE CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT PREACH THE GOSPEL WITHOUT MENTIONING THE COMMAND TO BE BAPTIZED...

1. Peter proclaimed the command to be baptized in the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost - **Acts 2:36-38**
2. Philip, when he preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch, must have proclaimed baptism in his message about Jesus, in view of the question raised: "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"
- **Acts 8:35-36**
3. G.R. Beasley-Murray, a Senior Professor at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY, stated the following conclusion in a chapter entitled "Baptismal Reform and Church Relationships":
 - a. **"First, there ought to be a greater endeavor to make baptism integral to THE GOSPEL."**
 - b. **"Peter's response, however, to the cry of his conscience stricken hearers on the Day of Pentecost was not "Repent and believe", but "Repent and BE BAPTIZED"! (Acts 2.38).**
 - c. **"Naturally faith was presumed in repentance, but Peter's answer told the Jews how to become Christians: faith and repentance are to be expressed in baptism, and SO they are to come to the Lord."**
 - d. **"Baptism is here a part of the proclamation of Christ. In an Apostolic sermon it comes as its logical conclusion."**
(Ibid., p. 393)

B. When One Studies the Scriptures Objectively, It Can Be Seen That Baptism Is A Necessary Part of the Gospel Plan

1. Honest hearts and open minds are necessary – cf. Acts 17:11
2. Do not trust in man, but trust in God as we are taught in his word
- cf. Jer. 17:5,7; 2 Tim. 2:15
3. Follow and teach the apostles' doctrine – cf. Acts 2:42

CONCLUSION

Let's be sure without apology, to follow the example of apostolic preaching (cf. **Acts 2:36-38**), calling upon people not only to believe in Jesus and repent of their sins, but to climax their response to the gospel by submitting to the Lord's command to be baptized for the remission of their sins. For then and ONLY then we can be assured that we will receive all those blessings the Bible ascribes to the act of baptism. Otherwise, one will walk after his/her own will or be a part of denominationalism which God does not have God's approval, and thereby miss out on salvation.

**** Much of this outline was adapted from outlines by Mark A. Copeland, a preacher in the Church of Christ**

(Questions compiled by instructor)

Wednesday Night Bible Class – Winter 2022
“Following Jesus Without Denominationalism”
Lesson #4
Instructor: John E. Branch
Northwest church of Christ

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss how powerful and deceptive is the influence of Satan in light of the plain teaching on the necessity of baptism for salvation (cf. Mk. 16:15-16).
2. It appears that some people would rather trust their salvation with what man teaches rather than what the scriptures teach. Discuss how this aligns with believing a perverted gospel. What is the eternal danger of doing that?
3. How would you help a person understand the necessity of baptism who says, “I just can’t see how being immersed in some water can save my soul. The Lord can save me however he pleases”.
4. How does one’s refusal to be baptized, especially when they understand the necessity of it, renders the command of God of non-effect in their lives? (cf. Matt. 15:3-6).
5. Discuss how realizing that God is at work in baptism should erupt a sense of awe of God in our hearts. After all he is an AWESOME God!
6. As important as baptism is in the plan of salvation, discuss how powerless it is in the life of one who submits to it and yet doesn’t believe in its necessity.