

BAPTISM

(Editor's Note: The following article was written in response to the claim that baptism is not essential for salvation.)

I, too, can share your joy in claiming kinship with Jesus in the Father's family. I was born into this world on June 13, 1930, but born again on November 6, 1946 in accord with Jesus' comments to Nicodemus in John 3:5. That new birth involved two elements, water and the Spirit. Thus I became a member of God's family, the church of Christ, as did those who responded to Peter's instructions in Acts 2:47.

It was the blood of Jesus which washed away my sins, and not the water of baptism. Peter explains in I Peter 3:21 that in baptism the filth of the flesh is not under consideration. Water could not erase my sins, or otherwise I would be renewed every time I took a bath. Please don't misunderstand my directness to be lack of respect or lack of love. It is neither of these, but rather genuine concern. I wish to point out something which seems to me to be extremely important regarding your understanding.

In your letter you correctly mentioned four items relating to our salvation: new birth, blood, repentance and trust. In addition to these four, the fifteen tracts and clippings you sent mentioned belief, confession, grace and the death of Christ. In your letter you used some thirty-six Scriptures, and on your stationery was imprinted two more. But in all these tracts, references, and comments, there was not a single mention of what the Bible answered to the direct question asked three times in Acts by those seeking salvation: Acts 2:37, Acts 11:14, and Acts 16:30.

In Acts 2:37 those on Pentecost asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter unmistakably answered, "Repent and be baptized" (verse 38). Did Peter tell them wrong? Can we not tell people today exactly what Peter told them then? In Acts 10:33 Cornelius said to Peter, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Acts 11:14, in referring to this incident, states that Peter would "tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

Acts 10:48 states, "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Was Peter wrong in what he commanded them? Can we not correctly say today the same thing Peter said then?

Acts 16:30 records where the jailor "brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul told him to "Believe" (verse 31), after which the jailor "was baptized, he and all his, straightway" (verse 33). Is it not significant that, even under the stress of that night, Paul proceeded to baptize those who had believed?

Let me repeat myself -- it is the blood of Jesus which washes away sin and not the water of baptism. But who of us has ever actually seen the blood of Jesus? Who has had its cleansing powers actually touch our sins? Jesus' blood is not understood as having to be physically present, of course. It cleanses through its sacrificial nature. And this is precisely where baptism enters the scene.

As the flesh and blood of Jesus is symbolized by the bread and fruit of the vine (1 Cor. 11:23-28), and as the woman's subjection to man is symbolized by her long hair (1 Cor. 11:5,15), even so is the death, burial, and resurrection symbolized in baptism. Paul unquestionably teaches this in Romans 6 where he says that the action of baptism both puts us "into Christ" and "into his death" (verse 3). Where is Jesus' blood contacted? In His death, of course, and that state is reached by us through baptism. Verse 4 pointedly says, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death." The water of baptism absolutely does not wash away our sins --only Jesus' blood can do that. But we contact Jesus' blood only in baptism.

Perhaps this will be more clearly evident when we note that in every instance of conversion after Acts 2 (the beginning of Christianity) and where the details are mentioned, baptism is always mentioned. It is symbolism to which Peter refers in 1 Peter 3:20-21 when he writes of those who were saved by water in the flood and then explains, "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." What more fitting symbol of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection could be used than this used by Peter in baptism? What words could more clearly say it than Peter's, "Baptism doth also now save us"?

HARRY COBB
Box 75
Wedowee, AL 36278

Adapted from an article in the Harvester, February, 1999

<http://www.churches-of-christ.org/Archives/Archives99/Harvester02-99.pdf>