

Baptism—Are We Saved Works? Jon Mitchell

This series of articles which studies what the Bible says about baptism has shown how the Scriptures teach that baptism is something one must do in order to be saved and have sins forgiven ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [22:16](#); [1 Pet. 3:21](#)). Many disagree with this for several reasons. One such objection stems from a very understandable line of thought: “The Bible says we are not saved by works ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)), and baptism is a work; therefore, baptism is not necessary for salvation.”



Salvation cannot be earned by works, disobedience will earn damnation.

Certainly baptism is something one does, and therefore is a “work.” However, is it a work of merit (by which one EARNs salvation)...or is it a work of faith (by which one RECEIVES salvation)? Furthermore, who is the one who is doing the work? Is it the man or woman who submits to being immersed...or is it God who forgives and regenerates them through the blood of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit?

In answering these legitimate questions, it must first be pointed out that there are different kinds of works. For instance, there are works of merit, which are done to earn something. Those who have done such works believe they “deserve” something; they believe they will be saved because they kept the Ten Commandments, or because they did good deeds and went to church. They do not realize that all the good we might do cannot outweigh even one sin ([James 2:10](#)), which is why we need the grace of God and faith in order to be saved ([Rom. 3:27-28](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#); [Tit. 3:4-5](#)).

There are also works of faith, which are done to receive something. Those who do works of faith believe that they “deserve” nothing. They understand their obedience did not earn or merit their salvation. They know their salvation rests upon the mercy and grace of God, not because God owes them anything. This is why works of faith could also be called works of God. In fact, Jesus called faith itself a work of God ([John 6:28-29](#)). Other works of faith commanded by God are repentance ([Acts 17:30](#)) and confession ([Rom. 10:9-10](#)). Jesus himself will specifically state on Judgment Day that those who will enter heaven will do so because of the benevolent deeds which they had

done in their lives, while those who will enter hell will do so because of the LACK of benevolent deeds done in their lives ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)).

Those who say that one does not have to be baptized in order to be saved because baptism is a work...does one have to have faith in order to be saved? Jesus said so ([John 3:16](#); [Mark 16:16](#)). Does faith require works, something done by you? Yes ([James 2:14-26](#)). Does one have to repent of sins in order to be saved? Jesus said so ([Luke 13:3](#); [Acts 17:30](#)). Is repentance a work, a deed done by you? Yes. Does one have to confess their faith in Christ before men in order to be saved? Jesus said so ([Matt. 10:32-33](#); [Rom. 10:9-10](#)). Is confession a work, an action done by you? Yes. Does one have to do good to all men at every opportunity in order to go to heaven? Jesus said so ([Matt. 25:31-46](#); [Gal. 6:10](#)). Are benevolent deeds works, deeds done by you? Yes.

What's the difference between obeying God's commands to have faith, repent of sins, confess one's faith before men, and do good to all men at every opportunity in order to be saved...and obeying God's command to be baptized in order to be saved? To ask is to answer. Would one say that one does not have to have faith, repent of sins, confess faith, and do good to others in order to go to heaven? Such notions blatantly contradict what the Bible teaches. So if faith, repentance, confession, and doing good are required of us in order to be saved...why not baptism as well, since it also is commanded by God?

What is hard for some to comprehend is that even though works such as faith, repentance, confession, and benevolent deeds are commanded by God, they are not meritorious works; we do not earn salvation through them ([Luke 17:10](#)). Instead, they are works God has ordained we do in order to receive his salvation. When all is said and done, salvation is still by God's grace and mercy.

Baptism, therefore, is a work of faith. It requires faith ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 8:36-37](#)), and is an act of faith by which one receives (not earns) the forgiveness of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:38](#)). Through it one receives (not earns) union with Christ in his death and is raised with him to new life ([Rom. 6:3-4](#); [Gal. 3:27](#)). The fact that baptism is not a work of merit is emphasized by Paul when he wrote in [Titus 3:4-5](#) that God saves us ***“through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”*** (an allusion to baptism; compare this phrase to what Jesus said in [John 3:5](#) and the continual scriptural references of water with baptism in [John 3:23](#), [Acts 8:36-39](#), and [Acts 10:47-48](#)), but does not save us by ***“works of righteousness”*** (i.e., works of merit). God does not owe us salvation because we were baptized. Baptism, like faith, repentance, confession, and benevolent deeds, is simply an act of faith by which we receive salvation.

This is so because baptism involves the working of God. Paul said while talking about baptism that we are buried and raised with Christ ***“through faith in the working of God”*** ([Col. 2:11-13](#)). It is God who does the work, not us! We are dead in our sins, but when we were baptized God made us alive, forgiving us of our sins. It is God who saves us, not we ourselves, and he saves us ***“through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”*** ([Tit. 3:4-5](#))...baptism.

When one undergoes surgery, it requires faith in the skills of the surgeon in order to submit to the operating table. No patient after the surgery thinks they have earned or merited healing; rather, they had faith in the doctor and were willing to submit to him. In like manner, baptism is a spiritual operation in which the Great Physician does his work. Our faith in God and in the death of his Son for our sins prompts us to submit to this spiritual operation of baptism, in which God does his wonderful work of cleansing us by the blood of his Son and the regeneration of his Spirit.