

MUST A PERSON BEING BAPTIZED UNDERSTAND THAT BAPTISM IS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS?

It has been correctly stated, that, "Christianity is a taught religion!" Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). In giving the Great Commission, the Son of God declared, "...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18-20). Ignorance of the will of the Lord is not excusable in His sight (Acts 17:30-31; II Thes. 1:7-9). Yet, there are those who foolishly claim that a person does not have to understand that baptism is for the remission of sins. They further contend that as long as a person being baptized understands that baptism is a command of God then their baptism is valid. Every command of God is essential for the purpose intended by Him. In fact, a person cannot be saved separate and apart from the commandments of the Lord (Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 22:14). Therefore, our Lord does not have any nonessential commandments. We are certainly commanded to be baptized. For example: The Apostle Peter commanded the household of Cornelius to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Since there are not any nonessential commands, a person cannot be saved by refusing the command to be baptized.

When salvation or its equivalent terms are found in the same passage of scripture with baptism then baptism always precedes salvation. There are not any exceptions to this fact. Let us now examine some passages of scriptures concerning this matter. At Mark 16:16, the Son of God declared, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Notice, "shall be saved" follows both

belief and baptism. At Acts 2:38, the Apostle Peter said, "...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." That passage reveals that "the remission of sins" is obtained when a person repents and is baptized. Ananias, a gospel preacher, said unto Saul of Tarsus, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). It is evident from that passage the washing away of sins takes place at baptism, not before. The Apostle Paul reminded Christians at Rome of the significance of their having been baptized. He wrote unto them, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore 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" (Rom. 6:3-4). In verse 3, he points out that they had been baptized into Christ. Question: what is the significance of being baptized into Christ? Answer: all spiritual blessings, including salvation, are in Christ (Eph. 1:3; II Tim. 2:10). Paul also states that we are baptized into Christ's death. It is by being baptized into the death of the Son of God that we obtain the washing away of our sins by His blood (Rev. 1:5). At John 19:31-34, we learn that the blood of Christ was shed after His death. Therefore, we are spiritually cleansed of our sins by being baptized into His death (Acts 22:16). And then in Rom. 6:4, the inspired Word states, "Therefore 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." Thus, we put off the old life of sin and rise from the waters of baptism to walk a new life. The new life as a child of God begins at that moment (John 3:5; II Cor. 5:17). At First Peter 3:21, the Apostle Peter wrote by inspiration, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth 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:" Considering the previous verse of that passage, Peter was pointing out that just as Noah and his family were saved from the ungodly sinful world by water (the

flood), even so, baptism saves us from our own worldly sins. Baptism serves a higher purpose than to cleanse the physical body. Our souls are made pure by the blood of Christ when we are baptized into His death. However, this would not have been possible if the Son of God had not been resurrected from the dead (I Cor. 15:15-23).

Without exception, the conversions recorded in the books of Acts reveal that those baptized understood why they were being baptized. On the day of Pentecost, when Peter convicted those gathered of having killed the Son of God, there were those "...pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" When they became aware of their heinous sin, those convicted wanted to know what they must do in order to receive forgiveness. The Apostle Peter immediately exhorted, "...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Question: did those inquirers understand what they were commanded to do? Answer: indeed they did, for after Peter further exhorted them, the scripture plainly states, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (See Acts 2:36-41). In gladly receiving the inspired Word, about 3,000 precious souls obeyed. Those obedient believers understood that scriptural baptism is for the remission of sins.

Ananias, the gospel preacher, said unto Saul of Tarsus, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Did Saul of Tarsus understand the words of Ananias? Indeed he did, because he arose and was baptized (Acts 9:17-18). A careful examination of all the conversions recorded in the book of Acts will show that all of them were taught what they must do and then they responded by being baptized.

The gospel preacher Philip wanted to make sure that the Ethiopian eunuch understood the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ before he baptized him. When Philip saw the Ethiopian riding in a chariot while reading from the book of Isaiah, he said unto the eunuch, "...Understandest thou what thou readest?" The Ethiopian immediately responded by saying, "...How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." This shows that the man was honest and sincere and was eager to learn the truth. In reference to the passage found in Isaiah the 53rd chapter, "...Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" When Philip preached Jesus unto him, the eunuch wanted to know what would hinder him in being baptized. Hence, to preach obedience unto Christ includes baptism. Philip said, "...If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch and he baptized him" (See Acts 8:26-39). This passage reveals that a person must understand the will of the Lord before obeying Him in baptism. Truly, Christianity is a taught religion, rather than a "better-felt-than-told" religion.

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