

Matthew 28:18-20

Baptism: Is it *Really* Necessary?

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Study Notes & Comments...

One of the most steadfast and consistent debates within Christian circles is whether or not baptism is required for salvation. To those who are debating, I say, "Stop debating, and just get baptized!"

Jesus commanded we be baptized.

In reality, it all comes down to this: Jesus *commanded* that we, who are his followers, be baptized. Check out Matthew 28:18-20:

"Then Jesus came to them (his disciples) and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey** everything I have commanded you.'

Jesus commanded his disciples to a) go and make disciples of all, b) baptize them, and c) teach them to obey everything he commanded. If you consider yourself a disciple (a follower of Jesus), then by that very definition, the command to be baptized applies to you.

If you haven't been baptized, it's time to simply obey.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus emphasized the importance of obeying his teaching. Read, and take to heart, Jesus' very simple words in John 14:15

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."

And Jesus goes on in verse 23 to give us a most excellent promise!

"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

But, Jesus says in verse 24...

"He who does not love me will not obey my teaching."

Do you love Jesus? If you *really* love Him, obey him.

When you submit to baptism you are saying to Jesus, "Lord, I will do what you have asked me to do." Perhaps you are afraid to be baptized because you are shy, or perhaps you don't like to be in front of people and are afraid of how you'll look. Maybe you have a terrifying fear of water or being submerged. I truly understand those feelings, but listen: those feelings are of the *flesh*. The flesh must be *overcome*. **Set aside the flesh** and put your faith and trust in your Lord. That's exactly why baptism is important, because in doing so, you are putting your flesh *behind* you and following the Spirit.

Baptism reflects the sincerity of your Christian walk.

Are you walking in obedience, following after Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength even

though it might be, at times, uncomfortable? Or, are you walking with Jesus only so far as it doesn't get too scary? I know these are tough questions, but please hear these words of truth with the love from which they are spoken.

Picture this: You're walking with Jesus and he takes you to the edge of a cliff. Now, Jesus says to you, "Do you trust me?" Your answer might initially be "yes," but what if Jesus then says to you, "Jump." Would you trust him then? "Do not fear," Jesus says, "I will catch you." What would you do? Would you jump, fully trusting in Jesus? It's easier said than done.

You might say this is a ridiculous example, but Jesus did something just like this with one of his disciples. Check out Matt. 14:22-32. Jesus commanded Peter to come out of the boat and walk with him on the sea right in the middle of a rather blustery storm. Though Peter's faith failed him, Jesus was there to grab hold of him and lift him up.

Baptism is not unlike this example, only it's a whole lot less scary. Jesus has said to you, "If you love me, obey my commands" and he asked you to be baptized in his name. Will you do it?

The Christian walk was never meant to be comfortable.

If you aren't willing to submit yourself to something as simple as baptism, can you really say you have given your *all* to Jesus? Would you, if it was ever required of you, *lay your very life down* for Jesus? If your answer is yes, and you haven't been baptized, what's stopping you? Again, if it is fear, put it behind you and simply trust the Lord. Your willingness to be baptized is one measure of whether or not you truly have a heart of submission to the Lord.

Don't give Jesus lip service.

There are those who hear the words of Jesus and take action, and those who hear his words but do not take action. Listen to what Jesus says regarding this:

"Therefore everyone who **hears** these words of mine **and puts them into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But **everyone who hears** these words of mine and **does not** put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." – Matthew 7:24-27

Won't you set aside your fears and put your trust in the Lord?

It's so important to stand solid on the ROCK and put your faith in him. If you put your faith anywhere else, when the storms of life come you'll feel tossed about, helpless and confused. BUT, if you put your faith in Jesus, you KNOW that he is in control. You KNOW that the Lord's hand is in everything that happens to you - even the storms that come upon you to test you. You can rest on the rock during the storm, holding tightly onto it, because you know that your eternity is secure, and that the pains and sorrows of this life are merely temporary.

Baptism is an act of submission.

As has already been stated, baptism is an act of submitting yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. True submission begins with obedience.

"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you." - James 4:7-8

"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience,

which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” – Romans 6:16-18

Baptism is a pledge to God

In baptism, we say to Jesus, “Yes, I will follow you. Yes, I will obey. I love you, and I’m willing to do anything for you.”

“...this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the **pledge of a good conscience toward God**. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” – 1 Peter 3:21-22

But, baptism means MORE than just obedience

When we are baptized, we are baptized INTO the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Study this passage from Romans 6:3-11 carefully:

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into his death?** We were therefore **buried with him** through baptism into death in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead** through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life**. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin -- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now **if we died with Christ**, we believe **that we will also live with him**. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

What does all this mean? Baptism signifies death and burial. When you are baptized, you are, essentially, putting your flesh under – you are putting the flesh to death. And when you rise out the water you are, symbolically, rising from the dead as a new person, alive and renewed in Christ Jesus. **In the act of baptism, we are uniting ourselves with Jesus**, on the cross as well as in the tomb and in his resurrection. In this way, you see, we cast off sin like an old garment. We are free from sin because our sin was put to death with our flesh. Sin no longer has any power, control, or influence over our eternal destiny. Paul’s point in this passage is that if we die with Christ, so too shall we live with him.

Paul also speaks to this truth in Col. 2:9-15. Here, he is speaking about the *result* of baptism:

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, **and you have been given fullness in Christ**, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised (the flesh being cut off), in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been **buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith** in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

It sounds complicated, but what Paul is saying in this passage is that baptism into the death of Christ will result in:

- 1) The fullness (righteousness) of Christ in you

- 2) The flesh being cut off (your sinful nature has been put to death)
- 3) You will be made alive with Christ

Be baptized INTO the fullness of Jesus

When you are baptized, you are identifying yourself with Jesus. You identify with his death, AND with his resurrection, and you become one with Christ. As Paul states in Ga. 3:26-29:

“You are all sons of God **through faith in Christ Jesus**, for **all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ**. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Through baptism you enter into the body of Christ. For those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no distinction between race, color, or financial status. All who are in Christ Jesus are ONE with him.

So, am I saying that baptism is *required* for salvation?

No. Here's what I believe the Word of God teaches:

- 1) **Salvation comes simply through faith in Jesus.** Whenever you are in doubt, simply read John 3:16. God made salvation simple so that *all* could understand. You don't put your faith in baptism to save you. You put your faith in Jesus. HE saves you, not any work you do yourself (Eph. 2:8-9)
- 2) **True faith results in action.** Jesus put it most simply. “If you love me, you will obey my commands.” (John 14:15). If you *really* believe and put your faith in Jesus, you'll follow him, and live in obedience to his words. “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:17) Faith and action work together. (James 2:22-26). Have you been saved? They obey him.
- 3) **Salvation is not the result of baptism, but baptism is the result of obedience.** Jesus says “be baptized,” so we are baptized. He's our King, and we are his willing servants. We obey, not because we *have* to, but because it's our desire to. Even if we are afraid, we do what he asks, knowing and trusting that he is in control.
- 4) **Jesus can overcome a lack of baptism.** For my friends who say you absolutely *must* be baptized to go to heaven, I refer them to the thief who expressed his faith to Jesus while hanging beside him on the cross. (Read Luke 23:39-43). This thief was never baptized, and yet Jesus assured him that he would join him in Paradise. Please understand, **your faith is the key**, not your works. However, **your works speak to the degree of your faith**. One important fact about the thief – his lack of baptism was not the result of disobedience. Having found salvation at that moment, while hanging beside Jesus on the cross, the thief never had the opportunity for baptism. I will bet you anything, though, that if Jesus freed that thief from the cross at that moment and said to him, “now go, and be baptized in my name,” the thief would have obeyed *immediately*.

Friend, Jesus saved YOU from the cross. He took that judgement in your place so you wouldn't have to! So, I say to you as I believe Jesus would say, “go and be baptized.”

Do it because you love him

I'm not going to go so far as to say you *have* to be baptized to spend eternity with the Lord, but what I will say is that if you elect *not* to be baptized when you *know* Jesus has commanded you do so, you are living in disobedience to him. At the very least, you are not taking Jesus' command to be baptized seriously. That brings me back to the question, do you *really* love him?

Baptism is more than just a ritual.

It means something, and it binds you to Christ. In a way, it's like marriage. When you find the love of

your life, you develop that relationship and eventually, as the Spirit leads, you commit yourself *for life* to that person through marriage. If you're a man, you can tell a woman time and again how much you love her, but until you get down on one knee and ask her for her hand in marriage, she will never know for sure how truly committed you are. For your wife, the sacrament of marriage *means* something. It's more than just a ritual or a piece of paper. **Marriage is your pledge** to stand by her, to share your lives together, to give her all your heart. The same is true for baptism. It is your pledge, your public testimony of your love for the Lord.

Along the same lines, Jesus loves *you*. Whether you are a man or woman, you are his *potential* bride. Jesus gave his life on the cross as an expression of his love for you. He took your judgement upon himself! What are you going to do with that? Will you reciprocate? If you delay your baptism, in a way, it's like your telling your potential husband, after he proposes to you, "I don't know... I'll think about it." It's not exactly the expression of love the husband-in-waiting is hoping to hear when he proposes!

As you can see, the issue of baptism is very important. It's a powerful (and convicting) subject. My final words of love to you on this topic are simply these: don't debate the issue of baptism with others. All debate does is cause division. Simply give the Lord your heart. Take that step, walk in faith, trust in the Lord and submit yourself to him for your whole life. In the end, be baptized because you want to obey, *not* just because you feel you should or because you feel guilty about it. Do it purely and simply because you love Jesus.

May God bless you.