

Is Baptism Essential For Salvation? (No. 14)

By Casey Head

As you may already know, the true purpose of baptism has been the source of much controversy in recent months. Some might conclude by saying, "We may not agree, but what's the big deal? Even if we don't agree on the mode or purpose of baptism, at least we're all baptizing, right?" In this brief article, I want to show why this is a "big deal."

In Acts 19, Paul came to Ephesus, where he found disciples who had been taught by an eloquent evangelist named Apollos. They had only received "John's baptism" (vv. 3). Paul replied in verse four, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after Him, that is, on Christ Jesus." How did these Ephesian disciples respond? Verse five says, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And all the men were about twelve." One might argue that these twelve men were sincere believers when they were baptized the first time and that they didn't need to be rebaptized. "The mode or purpose of baptism doesn't matter," some might contend. "All that matters is that you are a sincere believer." But not so according to this text! These men had received the wrong baptism and therefore had to be baptized again.

Also, please consider Romans 6:17. As Paul discusses the necessity of baptism (vv. 1-6), he says in verse 17, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." You see, baptism is effective in rendering salvation because we are obeying God from the heart the commandment to *be baptized*. But what if we are baptized in a way that is unscriptural? What if we are baptized as an infant, or what if water is simply sprinkled or poured on us? Does the Bible authorize infant baptism, or sprinkling or pouring? No! So when we receive these "unbiblical baptisms" we are not obeying God from the heart, for God has not commanded them. Or what if we were baptized "as an outward sign of an inward grace" as most are in the denominational world? If we are baptized for this reason, we are certainly not obeying God for the New Testament never says that baptism is something we do *after* we're saved. Rather, it is something we do to be saved (Mk. 16:16; Ac. 2:38).

If baptism is an act of obedience (to God) from the heart, then we must recognize that if one is baptized in an unbiblical way or for an unbiblical reason, they must be "rebaptized" for the right reason. They must be immersed in water (Rom. 6:4) to have their sins washed away (Ac. 22:16). As you can see, this is a very, very important discussion. After all, if you have not obeyed the gospel plan of salvation as it is revealed in the New Testament, and if you have not been baptized "for the remission of sins" then you are yet in your sins! Sincerity is good, but it does not save (Mt. 7:21-23). God requires our obedience (Heb. 5:9)!

If you have any questions or disagreements about the content of this article, or if you would like to agree to a public debate, please contact me. My phone number is (828)467-1463 and my email address is NCBibleQuestions@yahoo.com. If you contact me, you can expect to be treated with kindness and respect. Also, you can find all of the previous articles in this series at our website, www.LookingToJesus.com.