

## Is Baptism Necessary to Salvation?

*Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:18-20 HCSB*

It is interesting how many Christians believe that a physical act could lead to their salvation after God spent so much time trying to pound the very opposite into our heads. If a physical act was necessary to our salvation, why not stick with the sacrifices?

Oh, I know the few verses that are taken out of context and used to bolster swiss-cheese arguments. Some will quote "Then He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved..." but will fail to go on to "but whoever does not believe will be condemned."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, we are to be baptized, but the pivotal point is faith, not baptism.

In another passage we read, "Repent," Peter said to them, "and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup> Again they fail to go on a few verses where it was only those who believed who followed the Lord in "believer's baptism."<sup>3</sup>

Another passage that is frequently cited is Paul's testimony to a Jewish mob. He quoted Ananias as saying, "And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name."<sup>4</sup> The error here lies in failing to take the entire context into consideration, including the original circumstances. In doing so we discover that Saul saw the light on the road to Damascus, immediately referred to Jesus as Lord, obeyed the Master completely, began praying steadily, was given a vision as well as a mission, and was already referred to as "brother" by the self-same Ananias, well before his baptism.<sup>5</sup>

Of course the ultimate (and in my mind at least conclusive) argument on the issue is the fact that the repentant thief on the cross was not baptized and yet was assured of his place in Paradise by no less than the Master Himself!<sup>6</sup> What had he done to receive this wonderful gift? He acknowledged his status as a sinner and the justice of his punishment.<sup>7</sup> He recognized Jesus as the sinless Lamb and asked to be mercifully allowed to enter Christ's kingdom.<sup>8</sup> He did this in front of a hostile crowd.<sup>9</sup> Baptism is the WAY we confess Christ before men. He could not get baptized but apparently his public confession was enough.

Baptism is not salvation. However it is a required step of obedience for all those who can do it.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16:15-16

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:41

<sup>4</sup> Acts 22:38

<sup>5</sup> Acts 9:1-18

<sup>6</sup> Luke 23:43

<sup>7</sup> Luke 23:40-41

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:42

<sup>9</sup> Luke 23:35-39 cp Matthew 10:32-33