

### BAPTISM – PART THREE

Baptism is an act of obedience to God's word. It is not a work which earns our salvation. To be sure, many of the denominations allege that baptism is a work and that to require baptism is to suggest that one earns his way into heaven. However, baptism is not a work whereby one earns salvation. It is a passive act of obedience and submission commanded in Scripture. Let us examine the Scriptures to understand.

Paul, writing in Ephesians 2:8,9 says "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Put simply, man cannot work hard enough to earn his salvation. I cannot preach enough, teach enough or give enough to place God in debt to me. However baptism does not fit that pattern of work.

Our denominational friends would argue that faith alone is all that is required and they would cite verses such as (Matthew 21:21, Romans 4:1-16 *et al*). Some avow that belief is all that is necessary and they cite passages like Mark 16:16 which says that one who does not believe will be condemned (never mind that the very first part of the verse couples belief and baptism as being required for salvation). However, in addition to "faith only" most denominations will also tell you that you must pray to God and ask for His salvation while repenting of sins. To them, faith, belief, repentance and prayer are not works, but baptism is. The crux is a proper understanding of works mentioned in the Bible.

Let us examine Paul's view as detailed in Romans. The discussion in view here actually begins in Romans 2 where Paul notes that there is no spiritual advantage in being a Jew or of participating in the "works of the law." He seeks to contrast the law (i.e. the Law of Moses) with the law of faith (Romans 3:27 We would first note that Paul is showing the inability of Moses' law to take away sin while the Law of Christ does. In fact, this is the foundation of the entire book of Hebrews (Romans 2; Hebrews *in toto*).

Of great significance is Paul's thinking in Romans 2:6 and 13. Notice verse 6: "(God) will render unto every man according to his deeds." Now verse 13: "for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." James says "but be ye doers of the word and not hearers only..." (James 1:22; See also vs. 23 and 25). The Bible teaches that obedience to the word is commanded. However God is never indebted to us because we follow those commands. The very fact that God is willing to offer salvation in spite of man's rebellion is evidence of His great grace: "but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

We ask now if baptism is commanded? Yes it is, as evidenced by our previous article (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16 *et al*). That being true, is baptism a work, or more specifically a meritorious work which indebts God? There is no such thing as a meritorious work inasmuch as there is nothing man can do require salvation of God.

In reality, baptism requires nothing of the believer except submission. We bring no gift and we do nothing except to submit. The individual accepts the terms of salvation which includes baptism and he offers himself to God. He is then plunged into the water (baptism literally means to immerse) and arises a new creature. Perhaps baptism requires more faith than any other step of salvation. Belief, confession and repentance are all quite obvious and easy for the human mind to appreciate. Baptism on the other hand requires us to accept something just because God said so. We trust God to do what He has said he would do and that is to grant remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

We would suggest to our denominational friends that if baptism before, and leading to, salvation is a meritorious work, then it remains so even afterwards regardless of what we may call it. To describe baptism as an "outward show of inward grace" is incorrect and is a doctrine not found anywhere in Holy Writ. Baptism is not a meritorious work but is part of our required obedience to God.

In our next lesson, we will see the great similarities between our baptism and Jesus' death burial and resurrection at Jerusalem.

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**NEXT WEEK: BAPTISM – PART FOUR**