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A ministry of Open Door Baptist Church

7 Reasons Baptism is not Required for Salvation

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In Christianity today, many people espouse the idea that water baptism is required for salvation. While this article is not meant to be an all-inclusive list of refutation, or an exhaustive examination into the teaching, it is my prayer that it may encourage you if you are one who is battling the idea of this necessity for salvation, or that it may provide a firmer stance on what the gospel of grace truly means. Seven seems to be God's number of completion, seen within Scripture (e.g. Genesis 1), so I felt impressed to have seven reasons why baptism is not required for salvation.

1. Thief on the Cross

In Luke 23:33 we find that Jesus is crucified upon the cross, between two "malefactors." The Greek word for "malefactors" comes from two words meaning, evil - work, in other words, an evil doer. To the Romans and many Jewish leaders of the day, Jesus was considered an evil doer, along with these two criminals upon the cross. Aside from Jesus, the others upon the cross were dying in their sins, soon to be separated forever from God, in a place called hell. However, upon one of the malefactors' simple statement of faith, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," (Luke 23:42), Jesus promises him eternal life "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Obviously not allowing time for baptism, Jesus promised this man salvation "today" based upon his faith in the Messiah.

2. Day of Pentecost

On the surface, Acts 2:38 appears to provide a convincing argument for the necessity of baptism for salvation. As a group of thousands hear the gospel and receive eternal life, Peter notes that they gladly were baptized (Acts 2:41). Moments before, upon receiving conviction and inquiring on salvation, "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) Peter responds and states "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" (Acts 2:38). To properly understand this text, a systematic study needs to be done. In comparing Scripture with Scripture, we read many times where the gospel is presented, people are saved, and baptism is never mentioned as a necessity for salvation (Acts 3:12-26, 16:31, 17:1-4, Romans 4:16-25, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Galatians 3:6-9, Ephesians 1:13-14); if baptism was a necessity for salvation, you would expect to find baptism mentioned each time the gospel was preached, otherwise part of the process of salvation is excluded. Going back to Acts 2:38, the Greek word *eis* which is translated "for" can mean a variety of words: into, to, unto, for, in, on, toward, against, because of, etc. By understanding the systematic teaching of soteriology, we can easily translate Acts 2:38 as "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *because of* the remission of sins" (emphasis mine), indicating that baptism is reactive to salvation, not proactive. Furthermore, Paul clearly presents that it is the gospel of Christ which is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16), and the gospel is the death, burial, resurrection, and witness of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-8), an exclusion of baptism.

3. Royal Eunuch

Phillip, one of the original deacons in the early church in Jerusalem, was having a highly successful mission's trip in the area of Samaria. However, God's plan was not for him to stay there, but rather to meet up with a eunuch from the Meroe dynasty, most likely the eunuch to Queen Amanitore. Upon meeting this nameless eunuch, Phillip explains Isaiah 53 to him, along with the gospel, when the eunuch asks "what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Phillip's response: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (Acts 8:37). Baptism was not a means to salvation, but rather the ability to be baptized was predicated upon one being saved.

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4. Roman Centurion Cornelius

Jesus, in Matthew 16:19, gives Peter the "keys to the kingdom," which does not mean Peter has been anointed as the first pope, but rather that Peter would be the one God uses to bring salvation to the three people groups of the world in that day: Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. We see Peter using these "keys" in Acts 2 (Jews), Acts 8 (Samaritans), and Acts 10 (Gentiles) where these people groups hear the gospel through Peter's message and receive the Holy Spirit; it is important to note that in Acts 8, Phillip preached to the Samaritans however, we do not find that they receive the Holy Spirit until Peter comes down from Jerusalem, laid hands on them, and they then receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). However, I want to focus on the case in Acts 10 with Cornelius; Peter, receiving a bat kol from God, understands he is to break all cultural barriers and visit an "unclean Gentile" to preach the gospel. We are told in Acts 10:44, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" and the Jews that were present were amazed that "on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 10:45). Clearly the Gentiles in Cornelius' household received eternal life at that moment, prior to any mention of being baptized. Peter confirms this in verse 47 when he asks "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which *have received* the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (emphasis mine). The Holy Spirit indwells the believer at the moment of salvation, and God promises that we will never lose our salvation or the Holy Spirit (John 10:29), and as we can discern from Cornelius' account, that indwelling occurred prior to baptism, negating the notion that baptism is a prerequisite to salvation.

5. Apostle Paul & the Corinthians

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul opens the letter addressing the divisions these believers had among each other. Some were wearing Peter's jersey, others wearing Paul's, and a few had Apollos' jersey (1 Corinthians 1:12). Speaking against these immature Christians' association with servants rather than God, Paul makes the statement in verse 14 "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius". What a bold statement to make for the apostle to the Gentiles! Just a few verses later Paul states his call from God was not to baptize, but to preach the gospel (v17). One must ask the question, if baptism is a requirement for salvation, why is Paul glad he didn't baptize many in the region?

6. When does eternal life begin?

One must ask the question "*when does eternal life begin?*" In Scripture, eternal life is mentioned as occurring at the moment of salvation; from the moment one places faith in the redeeming work of Christ for their sins, thereby receiving the free gift of salvation, their eternal life begins. This is seen clearly in John 3:36 when Jesus tells Nicodemus "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life" (emphasis mine), and that according to Ephesians 1:13, the believer is "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" at the moment of conversion. Repeated in Scripture, one is indwelt with, and sealed by, the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, not moments, days, months, or sometimes even years later once a baptism is performed.

7. Is it free or not?

Paul states in Ephesians 2:8-9 "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." Examining this text we find that God, through the apostle Paul, is teaching that a person is saved (receives eternal life) by the grace of God through faith in Christ, and that our salvation is not based upon any work that we can do. Paul states elsewhere that "to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5). God, through Paul reiterates that if any man does a work, what that man receives is simply "reward" or the wages due to him. Thereby, if one receives baptism for salvation, then one is performing a work to merit salvation for himself, an act that God reveals will not merit the grace needed for salvation.

If baptism is not a requirement, or prerequisite to salvation, then why would one need to be baptized? It's like this, when your favorite football team wins the big game, you are never shy of expressing your joy and association with that team the next day at work, church, etc. In our church, there's a division of Alabama (Roll Tide!) and Auburn (War Eagle!). You can always tell how each team fared on Saturday by the reaction of the fans on Sunday morning. In similar fashion, baptism is a public demonstration of our association with Jesus Christ and what he means to us. In the process of baptism by immersion, we associate with Jesus as our old self, our dying and being buried, and then the new life we receive from Christ's sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's indwelling. We proudly represent the team on whose side we belong to and the victory he's accomplished! Baptism does not lead to salvation, but salvation should lead to baptism. 