



November 2, 2008

What Baptism Can't Do

From time to time we may find those who believe that baptism is indeed essential for salvation but may misunderstand the purpose and obligations implied by obedience to the will of the Lord. We understand that baptism is that which puts us into contact with the blood of Christ and therefore the salvation offered is through the grace of God (**Acts 2.38**). It is baptism that signifies to God, when done for the correct reasons, an acceptance and commitment to doing the will of God from that time forward (**1 Pet 3.21**). It is necessary to understand that baptism means nothing if we do not understand that as a child of God we have only begun in our service to the Lord. Scriptural baptism, of course, is the only recognized port of entry into the body of Christ from God's perspective, and it is the best and only means of starting our lives as true believers. However there are those who misunderstand this point and come to think of baptism as a one time shot that sort of immunizes us for the rest of our lives no matter what happens. Nothing could be further from the truth. The nature of the New Testament tells us that this is not the case as we turn to the pages of the scriptures. My uncle Paul, who has been gone for several years now, used to point out that there are four books in the New Testament that tell us what we need to believe in (**the Gospels**), one book that tells us how to become a Christian and does so through numerous examples (**Acts**) and is followed by twenty-two books that tell us how to remain faithful and remind us of what we need to be doing to be pleasing to God (**Epistles**). These proportions are not by accident. Throughout the spiritual history of man's relationship with God, the Lord has had to spend much more time calling his children to wake up, repent and do what they needed to do, than he has actually giving commands. Realizing that shows that the scriptures represent such infinite patience with mankind that only God would put up with us. The Gospel plan of salvation includes the fact that we are to live faithfully after baptism. I am convinced that the conversion of our minds takes years not seconds. Baptism represents the beginning of

conversion as Paul indicates as he writes to the Romans (**Rom 12.2**). Unfortunately there are some that see baptism as a procedure that needs to be performed, not a conscious act that implies acceptance and commitment. These folks focus on baptizing as many people as possible without acknowledging that the teaching, training and encouragement needed are many times absent. It is also possible that some who are converted form an attachment to the one who baptized them instead of to Christ. Paul comments on this issue in his address to the Corinthians. "**Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.**" (**1 Cor 1.12-15**). Baptism is not the expression of agreement with another person. It is not to gain entrance into a local body. It is not an immunization or vaccine that can be done and then forgotten about. In our quest to convert others we need to be less concerned with numbers and more concerned with the quality of what is being taught. We need to convey to prospects and converts that being a Christian is a lifelong commitment to doing the will of God. We do that by reading and studying the word of God. Peter states, "**As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:**" (**1 Pet 2.2**). Paul reminded Timothy not to neglect reading the scriptures (**1 Tim 4.13**) and that the result of studying was that he would be acceptable to God (**2 Tim 2.15**) and his growth would be visible to others around him (**1 Tim 4.15**). Baptism is the necessary starting point in our lives as Christians but is not the most challenging thing that we will face.

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