

Why All the Controversy over Baptism?

We might use the term 'Christian' baptism to distinguish it from the baptism of John the Baptist, the baptism of the Jews, pagan baptism, and even the 'outpouring' of the Holy Spirit. It is puzzling why Christian baptism is so puzzling to so many people. You will find no controversy over Christian baptism in Scripture.

Misunderstood Nature of Baptism

Have you ever heard someone say that baptism is a 'work'? Who came up with that idea? Whenever someone talks about baptism as a work, they are telling you what they have heard or read, but the source is not the Bible.

It is obvious that baptism is an action involving the movement and muscles of the human body. However, that does not put baptism in the category of 'works' unless you are using your physics textbook as a source. When Abraham left his home and went "to the land which I [God] will show you," was all that effort to move his family and his herds and his flocks to be understood as a work or an act of faith?

To understand Christian baptism, we must not place it in an arbitrary category based on human reasoning, but keep our focus on the text of the Bible. Christian baptism is not a *work*.

Misunderstood Nature of Faith

The Bible clearly states that we are "saved by grace through faith." So, what is that faith?

Look up passages in your Bible in which Jesus told someone, "Your faith has saved you," or something similar. Look carefully. Is faith a verbal affirmation? Words only? Is there anything that you see that accompanies faith?

Faith never stands alone, else it is not faith at all.

"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." —James 2:17 (NIV)

The idea that faith stands alone is foreign to scripture. Yet, many folks strain to dismiss salvation by baptism, but can do so only if faith, by their definition, stands alone as man's part.

When we read about Christian baptism in the New Testament, we see baptism portrayed as an *act of faith*.

Incomplete Reasoning

If you were to make a list of scriptures about the salvation of the soul you might be surprised to find that:

- ◆ Faith saves;
- ◆ Confession saves;
- ◆ Baptism saves;
- ◆ Grace saves;
- ◆ Calling on the name of the Lord saves;
- ◆ Jealousy saves (Romans 11:14).

I know, that last one is a puzzler...until you read the context in which the verse is written and bring it into the light of other scriptures that deal with salvation. The point is that a scripture taken in isolation (or especially taken out of context), does not tell the whole story. The Psalmist wisely wrote:

**The entirety of Your word is truth....
—Psalm 119:160 (NKJV)**

A single verse, whether it is about faith or baptism is generally not sufficient to provide a complete picture when there are other related passages to consider.

If a person misunderstands the nature of baptism or the nature of faith, or applies incomplete reasoning to the question of baptism, he/she will most likely misunderstand the role of faith and baptism in salvation. When it comes to the salvation of the soul, wouldn't it be wise to *carefully* study and apply all the Scriptures?