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## BAPTISM, WHO NEEDS IT? Sinners do!

It is sobering to walk through a cemetery and view the graves of infants and children. We wonder why their lives were cut so short and reflect on the grief their parents must have experienced. But, beyond these things, we ponder the eternal destiny of these who were on earth but for a fleeting moment.

Many people believe that babies are sinners when they are born into the world- that, though they have not done anything wrong, they are stained with Adam's sin. Therefore, they must be baptized in order to be cleansed. The consequence of this teaching is that children who died before they were "baptized" will be tormented in hell. To get around this, the Catholic Church puts these children in "limbo" (a place never mentioned in Scripture) for they are too bad to go to heaven (since they have Adam's sin), but are too good to go to hell (not having sins of their own). But, what do the Scriptures teach? Do children inherit Adam's sin? Is a newborn baby a sinner in need of cleansing?

Israel had a proverb that Ezekiel said they would not use any more, "The fathers eat sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge." (Eze 18:2-3). They would stop teaching that the children would bear the spiritual consequences of their father's sins. For the Lord said, "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon him-self, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." (Eze 18:20).

Babies are not born into this world spiritually dead because of the sin of Adam or anyone else before them. Jesus implied that children are spiritually alive when He said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Mt 19:14). Children are pure until they separate themselves from God due to their own sins- "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (not "because Adam sinned"; Rom 5:12).

Until children are able to know good from evil, God does not hold them responsible for their choices and therefore, He will not punish them for their actions. How do we know this? He spared the Israelite children under 20 years old from death in the wilderness and allowed them to enter into the promised land of Caanan. (Deut 1:39; Num 14:28-31)

Baptism is for those who are cut to the heart because of their sins- those who are able to repent, that is, turn from evil to do good- those who desire the remission of their sins. (Acts 2:36-38) Therefore, babies and children who have not grown to discern good and evil do not need baptism. They are spiritually alive and part of God's kingdom. What a comfort this is as we walk through the cemetery and see the grave markers of those whose lives were cut so short. Heaven will be filled with these precious little ones. If we are pricked in our hearts because of our sins, repent of them, and are immersed in water for our cleansing, we'll be able to join them around the throne of God- because the blood of Christ will make us as pure as they are.

## WHO NEEDS BAPTISM? Believers Do!

Two pioneer preachers once debated the subject of infant baptism. It was an outdoor discussion, as was common in those days- in this instance near a river. When it was his turn to speak, the preacher who opposed infant baptism grabbed the other preacher and began forcibly to lead him to the river, telling him and the audience that he was going to baptize him.

The preacher who advocated infant baptism was stunned and outraged. In amazement and anger, he cried out, "No! Stop!!" But the other preacher remained intent on getting him to the river. Finally, near the brink of the water, in desperation, the preacher who taught infant baptism hollered, "I don't want to be baptized! It will do no good!! When he said this, the preacher who opposed infant baptism released him and then made the point for which he had made such a commotion- "That's just what I have been saying. Since infants do not want to be baptized, it will do them no good!" So ended the debate.

Those who believed in Jesus were motivated by their faith in Him to be willingly baptized in the N.T. Here are some examples:

1) Acts 2:41- "Those who had received his word were baptized"

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2) Acts 8:12- "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."

3) Acts 18:8- "And many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."

Infants and young children are not capable of listening to evidence concerning Jesus, reasoning as to its truthfulness, and reaching the conclusion that He is the Christ, the Son of God, so they cannot be motivated by such conviction to be baptized. Baptism does nothing for infants except make them fussy and wet- that same thing it would have accomplished for the angry preacher in the story above!

If you were "baptized" as an infant, please realize that this did not "save" you. You had no need of "saving" - you were pure and innocent. And, you did not seek "baptism" because of your belief in Jesus. You did not desire it at all. Someone else desired that it be done.

But, perhaps now you do know good from evil. You know you have sinned. You've studied the Scriptures and, from the evidence presented, you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Let that faith motivate you to repent of your sins and be immersed in water so that your sins may be washed away (Acts 22:16)- not by same magic in the water, but by the grace, mercy, and love of God and the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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## BAPTISM IS FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Almost every "Christian" group teaches and practices something that they call "baptism". As we have noted in the previous two issues, most of these "baptisms" are not Scriptural "baptisms" at all because 1) immersion is not practiced and 2) believing sinners are not the ones being "baptized". As surely as most "Christians" are in error concerning what baptism is and who should be baptized, they are in error as to why a person should be baptized.

Some teach and practice baptism as a church ritual. Baptism officially places people into a denomination and enables them to be received into fellowship by a local church of that denomination. Others teach that people are saved by believing- by just "accepting Jesus as their personal Savior". Baptism is something people do after they are saved to show that they have been saved already- as an "outward sign of an inward grace."

But, let us see what Jesus has to say about the purpose of baptism. Men have no right to make laws for us, for God has given Jesus ALL authority. Jesus told His apostles, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Mt 28:18-19) Jesus commands baptism. You and I must be baptized because He says so.

Why does Jesus command us to be baptized? For what purpose does He order us to be immersed in water? In Acts 2, Peter preached to the Jews who had crucified Jesus. Some of them saw their terrible mistake and what it had done to their relationship with God. They felt the pain of guilt. They asked Peter what they could do. He replied that they should repent and be baptized "for the forgiveness of their sins".

The phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" is also found in Mt 26:28 where Jesus instituted His Supper and said of the cup, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." If we can understand that Jesus shed His blood for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins, then we can understand that to receive the benefits of His blood, a person must be baptized for the purpose of the forgiveness of their sins. As surely as forgiveness became available after Jesus shed His blood, forgiveness is received after a person has repented of their sins and been immersed in water.

Do you believe that your sins put Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God on the cross? Won't you be moved by your faith to get rid of your burden of guilt? Won't you repent of your sins? Then apply Ananias' words of encouragement to Saul to yourself, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." (Acts 22:16)

## BAPTISM IS A CONDITION OF SALVATION

If baptism results in the forgiveness of sins, then it is only logical that it results in salvation. Why are men "lost"? They are separated from God because of their sins. When their sins are washed away in baptism, then they can be reconciled to God and are therefore "saved" from the consequences of their sins.

Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." (Mk 16:16) However, many read Jesus' statement and still refuse to accept that baptism is necessary for salvation. They argue that if baptism is necessary, why didn't Jesus say, "he who has disbelieved and has not been baptized shall be condemned". Is this a valid argument? Consider the following illustration.

Radio stations have contests from time to time to promote listening. A typical promotion might be, "Be the ninth caller and give us the correct answer to our question and we will give you an all expenses paid trip to the Bahamas." We could state it this way, "The one who is the ninth caller and gives the correct answer shall be sent to the Bahamas, but the one who does not call shall remain at home."

In order to win the trip to the Bahamas, two conditions must be met- 1) be the ninth caller, 2) give the correct answer. To insure that you stay home, just don't call the station. If you don't call, it is a given that you will not fulfill the second condition to win the prize- you will not give the correct answer.

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In order to be saved from sin, two conditions must be met- 1) believe and 2) be baptized. To insure that you will be condemned, just don't believe the gospel and its message that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who died for your sins. If you don't believe, it is a given that you will not fulfill the second condition to be saved- you will not be baptized.

When a person believes and is baptized, they do not deserve salvation any more than one who is the ninth caller to the radio station and gives the correct answer deserves a trip to the Bahamas. In both cases, the one who met the conditions received a gift. In the second case, the radio station paid all the expenses. In the first case, Jesus paid all the expenses by His death on the cross. But in either case, no one can receive the gift without meeting the conditions laid down by the giver of the gift.

A person anxious to go to the Bahamas would call just as soon as the phone lines were open. What would a person do who was anxious to be saved? A jailer from Philippi and his family were baptized in the same hour of the night (sometime after midnight!) when they learned of Jesus and believed. (Acts 16:32-33). Salvation from your sins through the blood of Jesus is the most important gift you could ever receive. Shouldn't you be anxious to receive it? If you believe in Jesus, why not be baptized IMMEDIATELY?