

The Role of Baptism in Salvation by Chris Wood

There are literally thousands of so-called Christian churches in existence today. So-called because the very idea of there being thousands of them, differing in practice and doctrine, and also being Christian is absurd. Yet, this is the world in which we live, and sadly, some churches are actually proud of the divisions in Christendom. They tell us to choose whichever church or system of Christianity is good for you. It is being comfortable that really matters. They often avoid any controversy or discussion about how their practices and teachings differ or completely contradict plain teachings of the Scriptures that encompass the promises they proclaim to their members. One such promise that is given in every system of every denomination or faction one finds in Christendom is the promise of salvation. What does one need salvation from? Does baptism play a part in salvation?

If you were to ask any number of different sects professing Christ, chances are they would be united on their answer to the first question posed. Mankind needs salvation from sin. Sin is more than just a mistake or a bad choice. It is an attack on the holiness of God that aligns itself with the rebellion against heaven that started in the garden when God's word was questioned and His character maligned by the deceiver and adversary of us all (**Genesis 3:1,4-5**). Sin is a virus far worse than cancer, and the very nature of sin is deception. It always begins with a lie, and ends with total separation from the God who longs to be longed for (**Isaiah 30:18**). The bible is consistent in its claim that all mankind has sinned and fallen short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**). One of the many meanings of the glory of God is that His creatures do what they were created to do. Namely, for mankind, that means they are to reflect the God who created them in His own image. Since, we have all fallen short, and all of us have sinned, mankind is helpless in restoring his relationship to God. In order for us to be back in union with God, it must be God who acts, not mankind. We cannot bridge the gap that sin has caused, and we cannot reach heaven on our own devices. The message of the Scriptures is that God has acted in and as Jesus Christ to make possible the reconciliation of God and man (**2Cor. 5:19**).

What part does baptism play in reconciliation? Most professing Christians today will tell you that baptism plays no part in reconciliation at all. At most, it is simply an outward sign to some pre-existing inward salvation, and is optional for the believer. Others will tell you that baptism is the only way to have salvation and reconciliation with God. How is one to know the truth about baptism, where can one go to find answers? I suggest that if all those professing Christ claim the bible as their authority, than we must allow it to be our only authority in religious matters. If the bible is the one thing that we all hold in common let us lay aside all other forms of man-made doctrine or creeds, and see what the bible alone teaches about reconciliation and the role of baptism in the salvation of man from sin.

Those who would discredit the need and function of baptism in reconciliation would first argue that baptism does not save you. If, by saying this, they mean that the act of baptism itself is not the saving agent from sin, than to this I think we should all agree. It is the death of Christ and His gracious sacrifice that is the means by which any man can and will be saved. It is the grace of God that saves us from sin (**Ephesians 2:8**). Therefore, the argument should never be does baptism itself save man from sin, instead, to know the role of baptism in reconciliation we must understand at what moment the grace of God is applied to the soul of man to cover sin and present man in union with God. Again, we must remember that no act of man alone can unite him with God. God Himself must act and make reconciliation possible, however, once God has laid out the means by which reconciliation can be achieved, mankind must appropriate God's gift of grace by means of the obedience of faith and this is where a study of the role of baptism is of crucial importance (more on this later). How has God made reconciliation possible? God has made reconciliation possible through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The bible teaches that Jesus died for the sins of the world (**1John 2:2**). Blood has always been necessary for the forgiveness of sins (**Hebrews 9:22**), but no blood could completely take away sin until God

shed His own blood on the cross and made one sacrifice for all time (**Hebrews 10:4,11-12,14**). We are saved by His atoning death on the cross, but that was almost two thousand years ago! If His death on the cross was **when** we were saved, than I argue all mankind from that point onward have been saved, and are not in need of salvation. No, instead, His death on the cross is the once for all sacrifice that makes salvation possible, but man must accept God's offer of reconciliation. The blood of Christ forgives us of our sins (**Ephesians 1:7**), and Jesus shed that precious blood at His death on the cross. So, the question that remains is how man comes into contact with the cleansing blood of Christ and His death. We learn how mankind does just that in Romans the sixth chapter verses three and four which reads, **"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."** Baptism is the moment **when** we come into contact with the blood of Christ that forgives us of our sins. Notice the next verse and a crucial statement by the Apostle Paul, **"For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection."**

Baptism is a burial into the death of Christ, and so unites us with His blood. The blood makes possible the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, baptism is not the means by which we are saved, it is rather the faithful response that appropriates the grace of God to allow salvation to occur, it is the moment that the sacrifice on the cross becomes applicable to your sin, and you are raised from the water to a newness of life. Listen to Peter's words in 1Peter 3:21 **"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."** Notice carefully Peter's statement that it is not the removal of dirt from the flesh, Peter is saying that the act of baptism is not the means by which you're saved, rather it is the acceptance of the grace of God by faithful obedience to burial into Christ that saves you. This also refutes the claim that one is to be baptized as an outward sign to some pre-existing inward grace. Baptism is an appeal to God, an appeal of faith and a burial into the death of the sinless Lamb of God. Whereby one is raised to a newness of life, and his sins are washed away (**Acts 22:16**). Baptism is not a work of mankind, it comes from the very mind of God to begin with, and it is passive, it is done to you. Consider Colossians 2:12, **"having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."** Baptism is faith in the working of God. It is God at work in baptism. Our faith is in His promise that if we are united in the likeness of His death, than certainly we shall be united in the likeness of His resurrection (**Romans 6:5**). Have you been buried into union with Christ?