

Acts #11
The Truth About Baptism
Acts 2:36-41

As we continue our study in the book of Acts, we are going to back up and look once again at an area that many times causes us to stumble in our understanding of biblical truths. It is true that much of what we have been taught is simply “hear-say” and tradition, and some of what we have been taught is simply erroneous doctrine. Having said that, we will need to study these verses carefully, because right here in Acts 2 is where there are those who claim that the Bible teaches that one must be baptized to be saved get their information.

Therefore, look closely with me as we see what Acts 2:36-41 really says, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, 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 Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

Many knowledgeable scholars have said that the word “repent” in our text is a poor translation. It is difficult to find a substitute English word for the Greek word that is used here. To us, the word “repentance” carries an overtone of sorrow or remorse. **There is a Greek word which means, “to be sorry” or “remorseful,” but this word here in Acts 2:38 has nothing to do with emotion or feeling, or even remorse in its meaning.** The literal meaning here is “to change your mind, your way, the way you think or do, the direction in which you go.” The word “repent” here simply means, “to turn.” **You have been going in one direction; turn around.**

With that thought in mind, I want you to look with me at what Peter was really saying when he said, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit.” There are those who read this passage of scripture and conclude that the Bible is teaching baptismal regeneration, that is, that the water washes our sins away. In fact, there are major denominational doctrines based on this very passage of scripture. Those who believe in baptismal regeneration use the word “for” instead of “in order to” be baptized. They translate the word “eis,” “for” to “in order to.” One must not forget that in English as in Greek, “for” can mean “because of,” as it means “in order to.” In English we will say, “He is decorated for bravery.” The meaning is not “in order to,” but “because of” his bravery. Or we will say, “He has been cited for good grades.” The meaning is not “in order to,” but “because of” his good grades. Or we will say, “He was electrocuted for murder.” The meaning is not “in order to,” but “because” he was a murderer. So it is in the reading of the Greek, “...be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for (because of) the remission of sins.”

To make sure that we are not just taking word out of their context, look for a moment at how the Greek uses the word “eis” “for.” In Matthew 10:41 we are told, “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous mans’ reward.” “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall (eis) receive a prophet’s reward.” “He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall (eis) receive a righteous man’s reward.” **“Because” he is a righteous man he will receive a righteous man’s reward.**

Matthew 12:41 says this, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because (eis) they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.” **They repented “because of” the preaching of Jonah.** So the word used in Acts 2:38 is “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Christ Jesus, because of the remission of your sins.”

1 John 1:7 says, “...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Water cannot wash the stain of sin out of our hearts, even if we scrub with lye soap. This is a spiritual holiness between God and us. Someone else cannot do it for us. A preacher can baptize us, but he cannot wash away your sins. The blood of Christ washes our sins away. As He sat with His disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus made this statement, as recorded in Matthew 26:28, “For

this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sin.” **We are washed clean and white by the blood of the Lamb!**

If that is true, then what shall we do with 1 Peter 3:21, which says, “The like figure unto which baptism doth also now save us...”? **We must look at what Peter is saying to us.** Verses 18-22 speak of those who were lost in the days of the Flood and also mentions the salvation of Noah and his family, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, who at one time were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, in which few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water; the like figure unto which even baptism doth also now save us (not putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.” **It is essential that we allow the Word of God to speak to us here.** When Peter refers to the baptism that saves us, it is not the putting away of the flesh, but the answer of a regenerated heart before God. Peter is saying that the water destroyed the old world. It was full of violence and sin, so the water buried it. **Then out of the old world, in the rebirth of the Flood, there came a new world, purged of sin; and when Noah came out of the ark, he came into a new life and a new world.** The waters of the Flood must have made the earth innocent, and there was no crime. The earth was new and Noah entered into that new earth and that new life. **Peter says that is the figure wherein baptism brings us through the same experience.** The water held up the ark and saved Noah and his family. It is a figure of our baptism in the water – we are buried and the old world is gone. **We are dead to the old delights, the old tastes, the old visions and dreams, the old longings.** We are buried under the flood because we are born into a new life in Christ.

Then, lest someone thinks that baptism does it, Peter writes in parenthesis that it is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the regenerating power of God that does it. He was writing to Jewish people who knew all about baptizing. They baptized their pots and pans, their feet, their hands, and their heads – sometimes they baptized themselves all over. **Peter says our baptizing is a symbol and a figure of a great spiritual reality that we have died to the old world, and, buried beneath the flood, we are raised to a new life in Christ.** 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation; old things are passed away, and all things are become new.” **We**

experience a new life, a new hope, and a new vision in Christ. Once we were lost, but now we are saved. That is the gospel of the grace of the Son of God.

This truth is clearly seen for us in Romans 6:3-6, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” **There is no passage of scripture any easier to understand than Romans 6:3-6, for God has told us baptism is an outward sign to the world that we have taken on a new life!** Baptism shows them the process that has taken place in our lives. We have died with Christ, that is, we have become dead to the old self. **We have been buried with Him, that is, our lives are hid in his life and will for us.** We have been raised again to a new life through the renewing of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our bodies.

One of the most difficult things for the minister of the Gospel to get across to people is that salvation is “the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8) and there is not one thing that man can do, give, live, or be that will redeem him and make him fit for heaven. All man can do is receive the gift of God. That is the only way to come into the possession of a gift – receive it. Romans 6:23 says it very well, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

Therefore, it is no wonder that the Bible places a great value on the importance of baptism, as seen in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The importance of baptism is seen throughout the New Testament, as seen in Matthew 28:19-20, “And Jesus came and spoke unto them saying, All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

You will notice that this commission was given on the authority of Jesus Christ over heaven and earth. It is clear that Jesus spoke to these men, not as Jews only, but as to apostles responsible for setting up churches and giving the

doctrines that would enable men to become followers of Jesus Christ. This is the same thought that is shown to us in Acts 2:39, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

The structure of the Greek in Mark 16:16 is telling us of the importance of baptism instead of the fact that baptism is essential for salvation! Look once more at what we have been told, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The writer is showing us the importance of being baptized after one has believed, or else the word “baptized” would not have been omitted when he says, “...but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The damning factor in verse 16 is not failing to be baptized, but failing to “believe.” There seems to be no problem in understanding this very simple truth from the Word of God.

Folks, after all has been said and done, the most important fact that you will ever heard is the fact that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. If you will receive that truth into your heart and invite Jesus Christ to save you, you will settle your eternal destiny.

If you are not saved, why not come tonight?