

March 2, 2024

Circumcision and Baptism

Several years ago, the owner of a local sandwich shop followed me into the parking lot of his business, screaming that I was on my way to Hell because I denied that water baptism was required for salvation. In this man's belief, a person had to be baptized with certain exact words spoken over them or they would be eternally lost. Perhaps what infuriated him the most was that I quoted the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, ***"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."*** I Corinthians 1:17.

I am not anti-baptism, but I am strongly opposed to anyone trusting in water baptism as the basis or confidence of their salvation. The Apostle Paul dealt with a similar issue which arose during his ministry. Circumcision had been instituted by God as sign that a person believed in God. Yet, to the Jews, circumcision became more than a sign. It became the cause and proof of their righteousness, which in fact was only self-righteousness.

Circumcision was part of the religious *"flesh"* that Paul once trusted in before coming to Christ. Philippians 3:4-7. After coming to Christ, Paul not only

realized that circumcision had never added anything unto him, but his trust in it had been a great detriment to his soul. Anything that you trust in for salvation or righteousness other than Christ alone is actually a tool Satan uses to blind your heart to the truth of Christ. Paul told the Galatian believers, *“Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.”* Galatian 5:2. It wasn’t that a circumcised person could not be saved, but these Galatians were saved people who were trying to complete their salvation through a religious ritual. This ritual was in fact taking the place of faith in Jesus Christ thereby causing *“Christ to become of no effect unto them.”* Galatians 5:4.

Paul knew that such things were just *“flesh”* and needed to be exposed as such. He said, *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”* Galatian 6:15. Circumcision has no more power to save than uncircumcision does. Neither one can deliver a person from sin and cause them to be born again a new creature. Paul told us that when a person is made a new creation, *“old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* II Corinthians 5:17. This is not just a pronouncement in Heaven; it is a present reality that changes everything. Only through believing the gospel of Christ can such a glorious work be accomplished in a person. According to the words of Paul, if what you have trusted in has not made you a new creature, the thing you have trusted in has done nothing for you at all.

Jesus told us, *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; **the flesh profiteth nothing**: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”* John 6:63. Any and every ritual, ordinance, sacrament, or ceremony that one person can administer to another is nothing more than *“flesh.”* Some of these may carry great gospel symbolism and even be public demonstrations of faith in Christ, but none of these impart grace or have the power to save a single soul. ***“It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing.”***

There is no such thing as baptismal regeneration. The scripture records that Cornelius and those who were with him had their hearts purified by faith in Jesus Christ and received the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues simply through hearing and believing the gospel of Christ. It was only after the Jewish believers saw that Cornelius and his household were already saved that they baptized them in water. Baptism was only an acknowledgement of what God had already done. Acts 10:44-48, 15:7-9.

The confidence of salvation multitudes hold to is that they were baptized in water. If that is your confidence, your spiritual walk is built upon a fallacy. Those who trust in the ritual have their faith in a dead religious work and not in Christ Jesus. I am not saying that a person who believes strongly in baptism cannot be saved. I am saying that if their faith is in the ritual they are trusting in something that cannot save a single soul.

There can be little doubt that the early church baptized new believers as a public testimony of

their faith in Jesus Christ. But Paul's words "***For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel***" were spoken as a warning to those who were confused about where the power of salvation was found. God chose "*the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" I Corinthians 1:21. True gospel preaching always turns all our faith to Jesus Christ and the work of redemption He accomplished upon the cross. Any religious thing you trust in short of the crucified and risen savior robs you of the riches of His grace and could even cause the damnation of your soul.