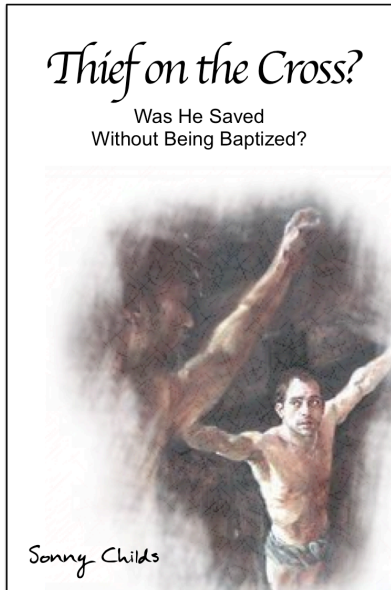


Thief on the Cross

*Was He Saved
Without Being Baptized?*

By Sonny Childs



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Introduction

For many years, the Christian doctrine of baptism has been haunted by the question, "But what about the thief on the cross?" It is the purpose of this study to answer that question.

Historical Background

The book of Acts was given its name for a very important reason - it is the inspired historical record of the origin and actions of the Lord's church. The example and the precedence set by the early church is nothing less than essential to our understanding of the Lord's instructions. After all, who better to follow than the very ones who spoke directly to the Lord and were specifically commissioned by Him to make disciples and go about "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you?" (Matthew 28:20, NIV)

Over time, the apostles and other early disciples passed from this life. In their absence, Christians were forced to rely upon the inspired written instructions they had left behind.

This Divine documentation was sufficient for some time but, as is always the case, human opinion began inserting itself into the doctrinal equation. It wasn't long until an elitist group of religious leaders insisted that they were the only ones who could truly understand those written instructions. Since most Christians did not have direct access to the text they were routinely forced into the informational bondage.

Much time passed. The hierarchy of Catholicism developed and ruled the common man with a very cruel iron fist. Self-study and personal pursuits of God were met with harsh penalties that included dismemberment, torture, and even being burned at the stake.

Then came the printing press.

As access to the Divine documentation become more readily available, a few individuals began challenging Catholicism's interpretations of Scripture. Unfortunately, by this time in history, Christians had grown accustomed and reliant upon the manipulative human influences used to understand God's will. Many were uneducated and for centuries they had lived with only the explanations provided by

the Roman Catholic Church. Even though self-study was an intriguing possibility, for most the process was just too intimidating. As a result, the opportunity for direct access to the inspired word was truncated into a pursuit of reforms rather than restoration. A partial fix, known as the Reformation Movement, was born.

But I ask you, is it enough to limit our selves to a reformation of Christian doctrine when a full restoration is possible? Is God satisfied when His people lazily depend upon human opinion + Scripture even though Scripture is readily available and is all that is needed?

The greatest difference between the Reformation Movement and the Restoration Movement is the emphasis on biblical authority. By definition, a reformation does not seek the original but rather an adjustment of the original (Scripture + Human Opinion). On the other hand, a restoration seeks the very beginning stage of origin (Scripture is defined by Scripture).

Consider a stark contrast in the way we approach Christian doctrine today. Catholics inevitably site human tradition and the Pope. Reformists rush to books and quotations from Reformation leaders like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc. But what does a true Restorationist do? They fill their comments with Scripture. Why? Because, by definition, the restoration process seeks the original, not a tweaked version of the original.

Catholicism and Reformed Theology differ greatly from Restoration principles in one profound area - hermeneutics (principles governing interpretation of Scripture). They decided long ago that human authority was necessary in order to understand God's Word. Restorationists, on the other hand, resist human input. They trust that the Word of God is enough to explain the Word of God.

Conclusion

One of the greatest weaknesses of Catholicism and Reformed Theology is their unwillingness to see the Bible as one harmonious package. While many of their doctrines seem to be supported by a few passages, when they are compared to the whole counsel of God, it is found that their doctrine forces Scripture into many inconsistent conclusions. It must be remembered that Satan used this very same tactic when he tempted Christ. He isolated passages in order to make them say what he wanted them to say. (Matthew 4:1-5)

The thief on the cross argument is a prime example of this satanic seduction.

As you study the following material, I pray that you will let the Bible explain the Bible. Moreover, I pray that you will embrace the whole counsel of God. I pray that you will see His book as a living, harmonious collection of instructions that never contradicts itself and always builds upon its other parts.

You can do this! Let the Bible interpret the Bible and, in the end, the undiluted will of God will be discovered.

Let's get started!

Part 1

Examples

In keeping with the restoration process that we discussed in the introduction, let's notice three sets of examples drawn directly out of Scripture.

1. The Undeniable Pattern of Behavior Demonstrated by Those Who Came After Jesus

For emphasis sake, let's first notice the resulting practices of those who followed the teachings of Christ. Below is a list of conversion stories in the book of Acts. Please take time to read each and make note of the common factors that connect all of them - baptism.

- Pentecost – Acts 2:36-37
- Samaritans – Acts 8:4-13
- Eunuch – Acts 8:26-39
- Saul (Paul) – Acts 9:1-18, 22:6-16
- Cornelius – Acts 10:1-48, 11:1-18
- Lydia – Acts 16:13-15
- Jailer – Acts 16:23-34
- Corinthians – Acts 18:8

When one approaches this inspired historical record with sincere objectivity, a single fact becomes rapidly apparent. Regardless of what happened to the thief on the cross, once the church age began, the inspired leaders insisted that baptism was urgent and necessary for the forgiveness of sins.

2. The Undeniable Pattern of Behavior Demonstrated by Those Who Preceded Jesus

For a full contextual appreciation of this subject, it is important to know that baptism was being practiced long before Jesus began His earthly ministry. Even before His forerunner, John the Baptist, the Jews had been using baptism in the conversion process of proselyte to Judaism.

However, as John the Baptist came on the scene, the biblical record became inundated with examples of people experiencing baptism for repentance and forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).

Q: Why is this important to our discussion of the thief on the cross?

A: The most common assumption made about the thief is that he was not baptized. This has been planted in our minds by those who do not seek a full restoration of

Christian doctrine. Given the passages below and the historical context mentioned before, the assumption that the thief on the cross was probably not baptized lacks foundation.

Luke 3:7 (NIV) "John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him..." (Underlined emphasis mine)

Luke 3:21 (NIV) "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too." (Underlined emphasis mine)

Mark 1:5 (NIV) "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River." (Underlined emphasis mine)

Matthew 3:5-6 (NIV) "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River." (Underlined emphasis mine)

Conclusion: It is very dangerous to believe that salvation comes without baptism simply because it is assumed that the thief on the cross was not baptized. Given the masses of people being baptized in the verses above, the thief could have easily been one of them. Do we know this for sure? No. But it seems just as certain that he could have been baptized as it does otherwise.

And there is even more!

3. The Undeniable Pattern of the Behavior of Jesus

Not only was baptism being preached long before John the Baptist, then greatly emphasized during the prolific ministry of John THE BAPTIST, Jesus took his amazing statistics of baptisms and expanded them to an even greater level.

Notice the statistical implications of the following verse.

John 4:1 (NKJV) "Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John..." (Underlined emphasis mine)

Implication: According to the biblical record, John baptized "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem" (Mark 1:5, NIV). Then Jesus came along and it was rumored that He "baptized more disciples than John"! The probability of the thief being baptized by John or Jesus or one of their disciples is obviously quite significant. Certainly, the probability is significant enough to discredit the misleading assumption that the thief was never baptized.

Part 2

Exceptions

Next, let's consider the possibility of exceptions.

Mark 2:6-12 (NIV) "Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

"8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, 11 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Underlined emphasis mine)

From this passage, we learn many lessons, but none more significant than the words which have been underlined. Even if the thief on the cross had not been baptized, two striking realities must be acknowledged.

1. Prior to His death, Jesus exercised authority to save whoever He wished. Even though the perfect sacrificial offering had not yet been completed, He is the Creator and has the right to make exceptions. Much like the Old Law sacrifices, the thief's sins were covered in eventuality by the ultimate death of the Lamb of God.

Transition in Testaments (Hebrews 9:15-17)

2. Before Jesus ascended, a month and a half later, He promised that the Holy Spirit would come and inspire them with a ***new testament*** church age instruction. The foundation of these inspired directives came in Acts 2 and are intended to govern the salvation process throughout our age.

Q: Will Jesus make exceptions today? What if a person makes a deathbed confession? What if a person dies on the way to his baptism? What if...?

A: He is God! Why would anyone attempt to limit God? Why would anyone second guess His potential? He is a God with immense love and mercy for His creation.

But that's not really the question we need to be asking!

Q: The real question is this: "Is it our place to preach and teach those possible exceptions and, thereby, distract followers from God's **clear** commands?"

A: Absolutely not! Even if you discount all the evidence that the thief very probably was baptized by John or Jesus (see the previous chapter), it still does not make it our right to preach the anomaly.

"Loophole" evangelism is the most arrogant form of hermeneutics (human rules for interpreting Scripture). It removes the exception from God's control and turns the exception into the rule.

Part 3

Excuses

In conclusion, we must consider the most dangerous part of this entire discussion - "But what about...?"

Matthew 22:11-14 (NKJV) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

As a young man, I struggled with this story. If the king represents God, and if God throws people out just because they don't have the right clothes, I feared that my filthy rags would be so unworthy He would surely condemn me to a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." After all, didn't the king invite the common folks off the street: folks who couldn't afford fancy clothes? The story just didn't seem fair.

Years later, while studying this frustrating text, I discovered something about that culture which radically adjusted my view of the king and his reasonable expectations. You see, it was not only customary for a king to provide the banquet hall, the food, the wine, and all the other party needs, he would also supply the wedding garments. That's right, the king even provided the appropriate dress.

All of a sudden, I understood why the king was so upset at the man who had been invited off the street. The man was unworthy in every sense of the word. He had been given an opportunity that was completely outside his realm of expectations. There he was, a commoner, invited into the king's banquet room. The food and festivities, were a dream come true. He had even been given a wedding garment! The entire package was free! **However**, much like the entitlement culture of today, this man's stubborn will caused him to refuse the only thing the king had asked of him - "Please put on the wedding garment that I freely gave you."

Galatians 3:27 (NIV) "...for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

You and I are the commoners off the street. You and I have been invited into the banquet hall of the King. You and I have the opportunity of a lifetime. There is no payment required! There is no entrance fee demanded. All that the King asks is that we clothe ourselves appropriately; that we put on Christ in baptism.

Why make excuses?! It's free! The clothes are FREE!

We live in a culture of loophole professionals. They have created entire church doctrines around assumed exceptions that lead to damnable excuses.

WRONG QUESTION: "What about the thief on the cross? He wasn't baptized, why should I?"

RIGHT QUESTION: "What about the clear commands of God? Why should I seek an exception when I know the will of the Father and I have time RIGHT NOW to obey Him?"

Staking one's eternal destiny on possible exceptions is both irresponsible and degrading to the will of the Father.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father** in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Conclusion

Examples: Being baptized for the remission of sins is an undeniable pattern throughout the New Testament.

Exceptions: God is the only One Who has the right to make exceptions to His rules. It is NOT our place to preach or teach possible exceptions and, thereby, distract followers from the *clear* commands of God.

Excuses: Being invited to the free wedding banquet, but stubbornly refusing to put on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27) is both selfish and damnable. Don't make excuses about something you understand to do and have the opportunity to do RIGHT NOW.

Supplement 1

Was Cornelius Saved Before Baptism?

Some time ago, a friend challenged me to explain why the Holy Spirit gave Cornelius the gift of speaking in tongues before he was baptized. (Acts 10) He was attempting to prove that Divine intervention indicates Cornelius was saved before he was baptized. The following is my response.

Acts 10 seems to be a ready-made passage for those who desperately want to find at least one biblical example which reduces baptism to a post-salvation symbolic act ("an outward sign of an inward grace"). But is it possible that, in their desperation to validate a human bias, they are distracted from the greater responsibility to submit to the whole counsel of God?

At least 3 important questions need to be asked about the watershed moment being described in Acts 10:

1. If Cornelius and his friends were saved before baptism, what did Christ circumcise during their baptism?
2. Does Divine intervention always indicate salvation or can it simply indicate that God has employed someone or something through Divine validation?
3. Why would God introduce such an obvious anomaly into the consistent biblical pattern of assigning miraculous gifts after baptism?

Let's look at each of these questions individually, then combine the results in conclusion.

1. If Cornelius and his friends were saved before baptism, what did Christ circumcise during their baptism?

It should be noted that Peter insisted on Cornelius and the others being baptized even after the miraculous sign was witnessed by all. Why? If their baptism was only intended to be a formality that showed they were already saved ("an outward sign of an inward grace"), wouldn't baptism seem a little anti-climactic? Perhaps an even bigger question is what would a purely symbolic baptism say about Jesus and His role in that baptism?

Colossians 2:11-12 (NIV)

"In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

In Colossians 2:11-12 the Holy Spirit clearly teaches that baptism is the very point at which Jesus performs the Divine operation called circumcision. It is the very point at which He removes sin from the heart. When baptism is reduced to a level of symbolism, the Surgeon is reduced to the role of a Public Relations Manager. Jesus deserves more!

If Cornelius was only being baptized as a post-salvation symbol one very obvious question needs to be asked - What good did a symbolic baptism accomplish given the fact that the Holy Spirit had already given such a dramatic validation with the gift of tongues? How could a symbolic baptism possibly top the reality of what the Holy Spirit had already done? Why would they even try to top the outward sign of the Spirit's miraculous intervention?

I suggest that the only thing which can top an external miracle done for validation is an internal miracle done for salvation. Cornelius and his friends were baptized for the very same reason that all the folks were baptized on the opening day of the church, "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38, NKJV). Their healing (salvation) did not precede their surgery (baptism).

2. Does Divine intervention always indicate salvation or can it simply indicate that God has employed someone or something through Divine validation?

In Acts 19, the Holy Spirit makes a clear separation between the saving power of baptism and the validating power of the Holy Spirit's gifts.

In Ephesus, Paul finds several men who were disciples but lacked a proper baptism. It seems that in their pursuit of Christianity they had only been immersed into John's baptism, a baptism of repentance. Paul explains that John the Baptist's baptism lost its purpose once Jesus had come and now they needed to be baptized in the name of Christ.

It is interesting to note that in verse 5 they obeyed Paul's instructions by being baptized in the name of The Lord Jesus. Yet it was later, in verse 6, that they received the Holy Spirit gifts of tongues and prophecy.

Q: Why were the two events separated? A: Because a person submits to baptism in order to be saved but the Holy Spirit assigns gifts to a person in order to validate them or their message. One shows Divine employment the other Divine healing.

Is there is difference between salvation and validation? Absolutely! Notice three examples.

In Numbers 22:28 God made Balaam's donkey speak in tongues. Should we assume that the donkey was saved? No, God simply gave the donkey a brief moment of validation in order to employ him for a temporary job.

In Daniel 4:28-37, God employed a pagan king to receive Divinely inspired prophetic messages through dreams. Should we conclude that Nebuchadnezzar was saved at the time of these Divine interventions? If so, then why did God punish the pagan king of Babylon for arrogantly ignoring His message? In spite of direct Divine intervention Nebuchadnezzar was transformed into a human animal that ate grass like an ox and grew nails like the claws of a bird. Was Nebuchadnezzar saved because God spoke through him? No, God simply gave this grass-grazing ox/king an experience of validation in order to remind him and the world that it is still God Who governs the thrones of men.

In Acts 9, Saul (Paul) experienced a Divine intervention when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He experienced a second intervention when he was healed of blindness in the city. Did these miraculous signs mean that Saul was saved without baptism? If so, then why does Ananias urgently admonish him after the vision and the healing, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and WASH AWAY YOUR SINS, calling on his name"? (Acts 22:16, NIV)

Since Saul's sins were not removed at the time of the miraculous events it is safe to assume that Divine intervention does not remove the need for Divine surgery (baptism). It seems obvious that Saul's pre-baptism Divine interventions were not given to indicate salvation but rather to validate Saul and set up Ananias so that he could urge him into the operating room. Is it possible that this is the same reason the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends before baptism?

3. Why would God introduce such an obvious anomaly into the consistent biblical pattern of assigning miraculous gifts after baptism?

The word, "anomaly" is used here with great intent. It means "deviation from the regular arrangement, general rule, or usual method." (Webster's Dictionary) Receiving the validation of supernatural gifts before being baptized was a deviation from the usual method.

Why did God employ such an attention grabbing measure in this unique situation - because it was just that - unique. Not since Abraham, had the Gentile world been invited into the favor of God. For thousands of years Gentiles had been looked down upon and rejected. This moment was not just about Cornelius' salvation, it was also about a very important pivotal point in history. God employed dramatic measures because He wanted everyone to know that it was He, not Peter or any other man, Who was validating this historical transition from "Jews Only!" to "Everyone Invited!" In order for that moment to be believed the invitation required a direct intervention from God.

Note: Even if a person were to argue that Cornelius was saved before baptism, and I do not, it would still need to be viewed as the exception to the rule not the rule itself. Immaturity is often marked by a preoccupation with exceptions to the rule or a

search for ways to get around the rule. Spiritual maturity, on the other hand, leads the faithful into full surrender to the whole council of God.

In Review

There is a great difference between being employed by God and being saved by Him.

In Luke 19:39-40, Jesus said that God could employ rocks to cry out if His Son was not given praise. Few people would conclude that it meant the rocks were saved.

In Acts 19:11-12, God employed handkerchiefs as a way to pass along the healing powers of Paul. Few people would conclude that it meant the handkerchiefs were saved.

In Numbers 22:28, God employed a donkey to speak a warning to His stubborn prophet Balaam. Few people would conclude that it meant the donkey was saved.

In Genesis 41:25, God employed a pagan Pharaoh of Egypt to receive messages from God that would save His people from a famine. Few people would conclude that it meant the pagan Pharaoh was saved. (Note: It seems that Pilate's wife was also troubled by God in a dream, which led her to declare Jesus an "innocent man", Matthew 27:19, NIV.)

On the other hand...

In Acts 8:9-17, we find that it is equally possible to be saved yet not be employed by God to do miracles.

Conclusion: From rocks and handkerchiefs to a donkey and a pagan Pharaoh it seems clear that employment by God and salvation by God are not the same thing. The anomaly of Acts 10 should not be used to suggest that salvation comes before baptism. Those who do so expose their own desperation to validate a human bias rather than submitting to the abundance of examples and directives that confirm the saving power of Christ's surgery found within baptism.

Supplement 2

Baptism's Commanded Essentiality

Some time ago, a friend confronted me about my claim that Calvinism is one of the most damnable doctrines of these end times. Because he is a leader in a church that has been distracted by this destructive teaching, the subject is a sore spot for him and he takes my challenges very personally. I assured him that my only goals were to submit fully to Scripture, teach only what the Bible teaches and rescue the lost from the clutches of the ever popular "Do it MY way entitlement religions."

During our lengthy discussion, the man referenced very few passages of Scripture. The ones to which he did refer weren't quoted and rarely were even given locations. In order to substantiate his claim to a superior appreciation of grace, he repeatedly referenced the positive things his church was doing. He spoke of the atmosphere, the outreach, the family values, etc.

I congratulated my friend on these positive accomplishments, then I returned the conversation to the original topic by asking him a series of very divisive questions. "But does your church insist on obedience to all the commands of Scripture? Does your church teach that Peter's words during the very first Gospel sermon are worthy of submission, Acts 2:38? Does your church teach that baptism is necessary FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS or do you use it as an initiation rite or an outward sign that sins have previously been remitted?"

Awkward silence filled the air. I felt sorry for the man. He was clearly under conviction. I wanted to say something that would end his misery, however, I knew that to do so was to interfere with the working of the Holy Spirit. I waited. Slowly his eyes met mine. "No, we don't teach that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins," he confessed with a tone of regret.

For a brief moment I had great respect for my friend's willingness to process and submit to scriptural authority. For a brief moment I was hopeful, I was prayerful that he would actually embrace the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Then it happened. Just one word. A very small word. Yet, even though this tiny word is only comprised of three letters, it often introduces a giant excuse, which almost always marks a Hellish victory for Satan's cause. The man's eyes glazed over. Defiance refilled his heart and he said it.

"But..."

My Personal Heartfelt Confession:

Satan has a very big "But..." and I am so very weary of watching it get in the way of God's will!

Matthew 7:22-23 (NKJV) "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

When will we ever learn to be fully submissive to the will of God?! When will we look beyond Satan's "But..." and realize that no church activity, congregational statistic or religious accomplishment is great enough to trump the authority of the Lord's holy command?

Do you know why Jesus will say, "...depart from Me," even though they have prophesied, cast out demons and done many other great works in His name? Read the previous verse.

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

We can call ourselves Christian all day long. We can claim a superior knowledge of grace all we want. We can rest on our laurels and take confidence in our accomplishments, but when the Lord returns, He says that the only ones going with Him are the ones who have done THE WILL OF THE FATHER!

What about you? Does your church submit fully to the full plan of salvation? Have you done THE WILL OF THE FATHER? Have you been baptized FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS?

In Colossians 2, we find three essential elements to this surgical procedure performed by the very hands of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:9-12 (NIV)

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Before noticing each part of this surgical process, please be sure to give special attention to the underlined words above. Baptism is the operating room. Because the operation occurs in baptism, it is critical that we view immersion as more than just a convenient initiation ceremony. Baptism must be taught as an essential part of the salvation process. According to the words of the Holy Spirit, baptism is the very point at which sins are cut away (circumcision). Due to the importance of the

Surgeon and His work, immersion must not be seen as an outward sign of an inward grace. To view baptism in that way implies that a person is healed before surgery and it diminishes the urgent importance of this commanded procedure. Baptism is the surgical entry point of grace.

According to Colossians 2:9-12, three surgical realities take place in baptism:

1. The patient is made whole. "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness." (Vs. 9) It is in baptism, Christ's operating room, we fully identify with the Divine presence. We are no longer separated by sin. Our relationship with the Creator is restored.
2. The patient is made clean. "Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ." (Vs. 11) It is in baptism, Christ's operating room, which the contaminating areas of our spiritual character are cut away.
3. The patient is made new. "...in which you were also raised with him...." (Vs. 12) Romans 6:4 (NIV) puts it this way, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." It is in baptism, Christ's operating room, that the metamorphic process of spiritual renewal takes place.

From this passage, it becomes vividly clear that spending time in Christ's operating room is essential to one's salvation. Patients must understand that, by God's design, the surgery has to come before the healing. To view baptism as an outward sign of an inward grace confuses the process. Healing cannot come without first experiencing Christ's surgery. Salvation cannot precede the operating room - baptism. When the entry point of grace becomes an after-the-fact ceremony of symbolic gestures, the celebration devalues the work of Christ in baptism and the foundation of conversion is eroded.

Conclusion

Just before making the statement which I cited above (Matthew 7:21), Jesus gave this very important warning to His followers, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15, NKJV)

Know this, when Satan's "But..." gets in the way, you can be fully assured that ravenous wolves have gone to feeding. The only way to survive their attack is to drop the "But...", hit the knees and call out toward Heaven, "Not my will, but Thine be done!"

Submission to the full counsel of God is essential! Taking Him at His Word without interference from any manmade doctrine is the only way to escape the warning of Matthew 7:15-21! Will you do it? Will you pursue Him with wide-eyed abandonment? Will you engage in full-throttle submission?

Temptation

*Sometimes it's hard to choose what's best,
Select the right and pass the test,
To push aside that stubborn will,
To tell the selfish voice, "Be still!"*

*When Satan's "But..." gets in my way,
I close my eyes and then I pray,
"Lord, lead me through the half-truth lies.
Please shield me from the compromise."*

*I ask for strength to see His will,
To yield, submit, obey until
The Lord returns in bright array
And takes me home. Oh, what a day!!*

Supplement 3

God's Plan of Salvation

The following material is only a summary. Use it only as a guide and never feel limited to draw from other passages that address the same subject.

Romans 3:23 (NIV)

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,....”

A person must realize he is a sinner.

Romans 6:23 (NIV)

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The word “death” in this passage means separation. Here it means separation from God.

A person must understand that, since we have all sinned, our payment (“wages”) for sinning is separation from God eternally (“death” or hell).

Since eternal life is a “gift,” a person must understand there is no way to work hard enough to deserve it. Only God can give this gift and we must be in Jesus to get the gift.

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

“...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Since Christ died for us while we were still sinners, we can accept His forgiveness while we are still sinners. Some say, “I’ll be saved as soon as I break a few of my sinful habits.” That is doing things backwards, according to this verse.

Romans 10:9 (NIV)

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The word “Lord,” in this passage, is far more than just a second name for Jesus. It is also His title or description. The word “Lord” means master, ruler or boss. A person must be willing to publicly admit that he is accepting Jesus as his boss.

The word “believe” also has a far deeper meaning than just mental acknowledgment or confidence. Biblical belief has always been a

combination of both confidence and obedience. (See James 2:14-26.) Yes, as this verse says, belief will save you, but only if it is true biblical belief that is full of confident obedience.

This verse specifically says we must have confident obedience to the power of the resurrection. In the last passage of this study, Romans 6:3-4, we will see what a person must do to obey the power of the resurrection.

Romans 2:4 (NIV)

“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you towards repentance?”

The word “repentance” refers to the act of turning one’s life around, walking in a new direction or following after a new master.

In order to be saved, a person must take responsibility for their actions, reject their earlier lifestyle and begin a pattern of disciplined change.

All of the material thus far has been about our approach to God for salvation. But the Father wants much more. He wants to bring us into the family. It is not enough to just come back to God. We must come inside!

In the remaining material, we will uncover the doorway that leads us inside the salvation of God. Romans 6:23 says, “...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The word “in” is such a small word, but it means so very much. Eternal life is not found by just coming back to God, eternal life is found by coming inside.

But how does a person get inside Christ Jesus? The answer is simple and found only a few verses earlier in Romans 6:3, “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus....” Verse four goes on to say that “a new life” comes after one is baptized. Baptism is undoubtedly the door that gets us inside.

Let’s notice this passage more closely.

Roman 6:3-4 (NIV)

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

In this passage, we are told that baptism is the door that leads “into Christ.” It is a very important step. We also find that baptism is a duplication of the greatest event in history - the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Every time a person is baptized, he/she duplicates

the very steps that Jesus went through to save us from our sin. Baptism is like an instant replay of Christ's defeat of Satan. Baptism is God's favorite instant replay and He loves to see it over and over again.

Please consider a few very important questions about this God-sanctioned doorway. It is very important that you let God answer for Himself, even if it means you have to reject a pre-held position or even the teachings of a most trusted friend. Let God speak.

According to this passage, how does a person get "into Christ"?

According to this passage, is it possible to bury a person in water if you only sprinkle or pour water on their head? The word "baptism" in this passage means to immerse, surround or cover over. We know this for many reasons, but the most obvious is that it is called a burial.

According to this passage, does the "new life" come before or after the burial (baptism)?

According to this passage, is baptism just an outward sign that you were saved at an earlier time? Remember the answer to the last question.

If baptism is the step that washes away your sins and gives you a "new life," does salvation come before baptism?

Have you been baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of sins?

Are you willing to do things God's way?

Baptism is not a popular concept among many in the religious world. Many preachers delete baptism from their sermons and only preach that which is convenient. God once warned of a time like this. He said, "...the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (II Timothy 4:3)

Are you looking for God's message or are you looking for someone to say only what you want to hear? Are you sincerely interested in finding salvation according to God's plan? If you are, then now is the time for you to be honest with yourself and with God. Are you saved? Are you inside Christ? Review the following biblical steps for yourself:

1. You must understand that "all have sinned," including yourself, and that salvation can only be found in the free gift of God. (Romans 3:23, 6:23, 5:8)

2. You must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. (Romans 10:9-10)
3. You must accept Jesus as your personal Lord and master, then confess that fact before men. (Romans 10:9-10)
4. You must be willing to repent or turn from following after evil and focus your life on Christ. (Romans 2:4)
5. You must be willing to die to your own selfish desires. You must be buried in water like Jesus was buried in a tomb and you must be raised out of that water to walk a “new life.” (Romans 6:3-4)

Have you done these things? There is no greater feeling than knowing you did it God’s way. As we learned earlier, many on the Day of Judgment will expect to go to Heaven, yet be turned away because they failed to do it God’s way. Please do not risk your eternal salvation on a feeling or on a confidence that comes from being part of the “majority.” Real goodness comes only from God. His opinion is all that matters. How will He judge you?

I leave you with the same advice that was also given to Paul when he was confronted with the decision that you are now facing.

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16, NIV)