

After studying the Bible for some time, earnestly desiring to obey God's will, a young woman approached a preacher in her town and asked if he would assist her in being baptized. "Why would you want to do that?" he asked. She said, "The Bible teaches that we should." He told her that it was not important ... that it was for children ... but was not necessary for her. He said it would be a lot of trouble and that he really didn't want to do it. Desiring to please God rather than men, she left that place, found someone who would help her, and she was baptized!

It is hard to believe that baptism is unimportant when the Bible says that it is for the forgiveness of sins and that it saves us! Yes ... that is what it says. In Acts 2:37, convicted sinners asked the question, "What shall we do?" To which the apostle Peter replied, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When Peter gave that response, he was only following the command of Jesus. Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus commanded His apostles to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Then Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). It seems likely that Jesus would have known the purpose of baptism. I would hate to say it is not important when Jesus commanded to do it in order to be saved!

Later in his life, the apostle Peter wrote a general letter to the church. He had not changed his mind about the purpose of baptism since the Acts 2:38 incident. He wrote, "And 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" (I Peter 3:21). Peter was not deluded with some "water salvation theology." He fully recognized the importance of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus to salvation. But he said that baptism was the point at which we make an "appeal" to God to make our consciences clean. The word translated "appeal" in the NASB is the Greek word "eperotaw" which means "to ask, require, request, or seek after." Baptism is the point at which we are requesting a clean conscience. We can only enjoy a "clean conscience" if our sins are forgiven. Thus, baptism is the appeal for forgiveness.

In Acts 22:16, we find another example of baptism being referred to as an appeal to God. A man named Saul of Tarsus is grieving over his sins, being full of faith in Christ. A disciple of Christ named Ananias comes to Saul and tells him what to do. He said, "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Ananias did not consider Saul's faith (alone) to be sufficient for salvation, for his sins still needed to be "washed away." It seems that Peter and Ananias agreed concerning the purpose of baptism. Not only did Ananias say that baptism is the point at which sins are removed, but he also agrees that baptism is the point at which we are "calling on His name."

Saul of Tarsus was later called "The Apostle Paul." He wrote a letter to the church at Rome in which he said, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). What do you think Paul meant by that statement? Do you think he had in mind some other means of salvation than what his colleague, the apostle Peter, taught? Or was he now teaching some other means of salvation than the disciple who had instructed him?

As we shall see in the next Bible Talk, the apostle Paul knew exactly what the purpose was for baptism and he had a lot to say about it.

1. In Acts 2:38, the apostle Peter said that baptism was for what purpose?
2. In Mark 16:16, the Lord Jesus Christ said that belief and baptism would result in what?
3. From I Peter 3:21, complete the words of this quotation: "...baptism now \_\_\_\_\_ ."
4. When a person is baptized, that person is "appealing" to God for what? (I Peter 3:21)
5. What does the "appeal" of I Peter 3:21 have in common with the "call" of Acts 22:16?
6. Saul was told that baptism would do what for him? (Acts 22:16)
7. Did Saul have "FAITH" in Christ when he was told to wash away his sins?  
What conclusion might you draw from this?
8. Do you think Romans 10:13 is teaching a different means of salvation than I Peter 3:21 and Acts 22:16?
9. How would you explain the purpose of baptism?