

Does Baptism save? a study of 1 Peter 3:21 ESV

Written by Calvin Fox

Wednesday, 04 August 2010 18:25 -

20 ... God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

21 Baptism, which corresponds to this [what the ark did for Noah], now saves you,

In the NIV the Flood water symbolizes the water of Baptism, but the comparison of Baptism and Ark is better. The water [the Flood] brought judgement and death for the world. The ark saved Noah from that judgment and death. This is the context which determines the meaning of what follows. As with the flood waters, the water of Baptism is judgment and death. By Baptism we are saved from judgement and death that Christ went through. Alternatively, our Baptism was a judgment on our sin and by it we did die in union with Christ (Rom 6:1-14) This harmonizes with the concept that Baptism replaces and functions as Circumcision- Col 2:11-12

[Baptism is] not the removal of dirt from the body [it is not a mere ceremony offering ritual cleansing] but it is an appeal to God for a good conscience [ie- inner moral cleansing] This is how most translations render this verse.

appeal = *eperōtēma* = 1) an enquiry, a question [KJV translates "answer"] 2) a demand 3) earnestly seeking (an appeal) The word is used in legal contracts: an appeal and the response [Some take the text to mean Baptism is the occasion when the Believer is questioned about his faith and gives answers to the questions.]

[if *eperotema* is translated as "pledge" [as in NIV- a variation of "answer" in KJV] than the verse is taken to Baptism is a pledge by a good conscience to be a loyal soldier of Christ. See comments below]

"a good conscience", *syneidēsis* is lit., "a knowing with" (sun, "with," oida, "to know"), i.e., "a co-knowledge (with oneself), a consciousness within to one's moral conduct

"Conscience" is that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former and avoid the latter -Rom 2:15

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"Conscience" is the sense of guiltiness before God 1 Peter 3:16, 1 Cor 8:7; Titus 1:15

Acts 23:1- having a good conscience before God cf I Tim 1:5,19; Heb 13:18

Heb 9:14 blood of Christ cleanses the conscience

Heb 10:22 Baptism cleanses the guilty conscience NAS having [had] our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water- both actions happened simultaneously]

Summary: Baptism saves because it is the occasion when a Believer appeals to God for cleansing of his conscience, ie- for moral purity and receives it

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

How are the resurrection of Jesus and Baptism connected?

1 Peter 1:3 NAS Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

The wider context for 1 Peter 3:21 is a call to holiness. The paragraph is an exhortation to stand firm for righteousness against evil, to keep a good conscience. (See 3:8-22) Read this in light of what Paul says about Baptism (below). It unites the believer with the resurrection of Christ, with new life in Him. Our new life is because of His resurrection life. We now live in Him

Baptism is the occasion when the Baptized is united with the resurrection of Christ (Rom 6) and enters into His resurrection life in opposition against evil powers.

Romans 6 CSB 3 are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life. 5 For if we have been joined with Him in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of His resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin's dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, 7 since a person who has died is freed from sin's claims. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him, 9 because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, no longer dies. Death no longer rules over Him. 10 For in that He died, He died to sin once for all; but in that He lives, He lives to God. 11 So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.

The above supports the argument that Baptism is also a sacramentum, which is Latin for a pledge to be a loyal soldier (of Christ and to stand with Him in battle against unrighteousness).

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[Sacramentum has a different meaning than the later Catholic term, Sacrament] and this may be added to teaching about the meaning of Baptism. But the primary reference of Baptism is and must be to the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Baptism as Pledge is secondary.

Conclusion

1 Peter 3:21 absolutely does not teach Baptism itself alone saves.

Baptism must always be accompanied by [something] It is not effectual without or until that [something] is provided. The [something] is faith. It is the combination of faith (the "appeal"- I believe Jesus is the Christ, etc therefore...) with Baptism that saves.

Eph 5:25 Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word [of Faith],

Of course, it is God that saves. The issue here is about the instrument He uses to do that

Eph 5:25 Christ also loved the church ...having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word [of Faith],

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing [loutron (a noun) = the bath = the thing in which washing is done = baptistry or the Baptism] of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, cf John 3:5

Acts 22:16 ... be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Act 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for [eis- into] the forgiveness of your sins