

Believe, Baptized and Saved

Congratulations to the more-than-a-dozen brothers and sisters who professed their belief in the Lord and were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in December 2017.

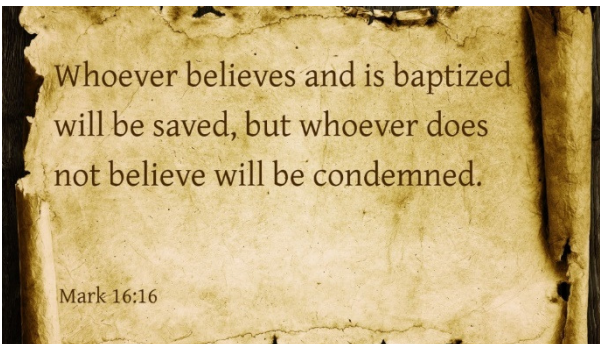
The importance of baptism cannot be underestimated, for it was Christ who personally gave the unequivocal command in Matt 28:19-20.

Note that there are two parts in the command; the first part is about baptism per se and the second part is about teaching all to obey the command of the Lord.

In obedience to God's will, Jesus himself was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist to fulfil all righteousness. The enormity of the event and the moment was powerfully reinforced by the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father. (Matt 3:13-17)

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:19-20



Some Christians quote Mk 16:16 and wonder about whether baptism is indeed necessary for salvation.

Recall that the Pharisees asked Jesus whether the Jews should pay taxes to Caesar. It was a risky question to answer **YES**

or **NO**, because either way the Pharisees would have something up their sleeves to catch Jesus in His words. (Mk 12:13)

This is but one illustration of how certain questions can be difficult to give a straightforward YES or NO as answer, because either way may be open to misinterpretations; so it is with the question on whether baptism is necessary for salvation.

If I answer YES, I expect to be bombarded with these examples:

- A person accepted Christ by faith and was on his way to church to receive baptism when he met a fatal accident.

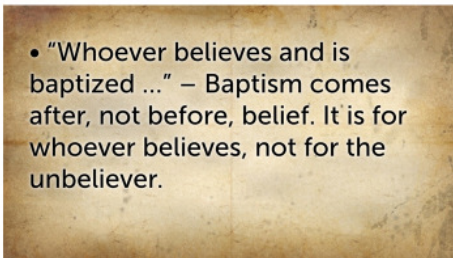
- A person accepted Christ by faith on his deathbed and died before his pastor had time to arrange a baptism for him.

Wouldn't the two persons be saved by grace through faith alone? If not, it makes a mockery of Eph. 2:8. If yes, does it not affirm that baptism is non-essential?

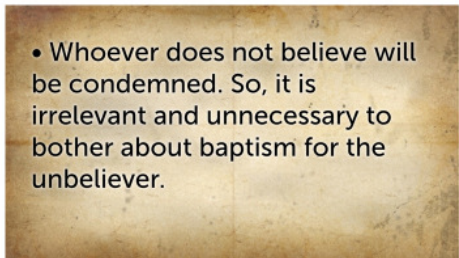
If I answer NO, I risk being labelled as thoughtless in my attitude towards this Holy Sacrament which is without doubt a profound command since it was pronounced by our Lord Himself.

The emphasis on the importance of believing is without doubt in Mk 16:16. However, the importance of baptism is certainly simultaneously underscored by Jesus' explicit mention of it closely in tandem with belief and salvation.

Jesus' instruction that "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" can be properly understood as follows:



• "Whoever believes and is baptized ..." – Baptism comes after, not before, belief. It is for whoever believes, not for the unbeliever.



• Whoever does not believe will be condemned. So, it is irrelevant and unnecessary to bother about baptism for the unbeliever.

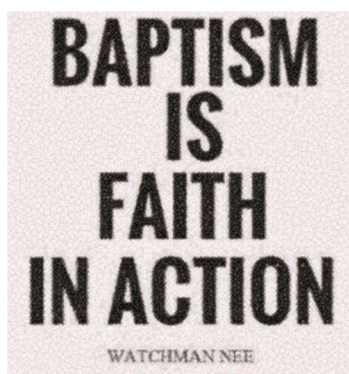
Remarkably, Jesus also pronounced these words as recorded in Jn 14:15, "If you love me, keep my commands."

As Christians, we profess faith in Christ, the faith that gains us salvation by God's grace. What are we to make of our faith if we have no love for Christ and what are we to make of our love for Christ if we can freely choose to ignore His command on baptism?

As Christians, it is our duty to study God's Word, and within God's word is this very command on baptism from the Lord Himself. Whatever your first thought is on the necessity of baptism for salvation, you must be honest to yourself with your reason. You may not disclose your reason to men, but God knows your thoughts.

In your study, meditate on these two scenarios:

- A loved one who received Christ and wanted to be baptised but was thwarted from it not by his own election before passing away. You are convinced that God is fair and that the loved one is saved by his faith.
- A friend claims to have received Christ by faith and been a Christian for years, regularly attending church; yet he gives scant respect to the Lord's command on baptism. Does his rejection of baptism attest to the state of his faith, or to a lack of understanding of God's Word because nobody in his church tells him about the solemnity of the Holy Sacrament?



Receiving baptism is an act of obedience. Not receiving baptism in defiance is an act of disobedience. However, not receiving baptism because of involuntary circumstances is entirely different.

"Baptism is an outward expression of an inward faith," Watchman Nee, Author

Alternatively speaking, baptism testifies outwardly of a person's faith commitment. Therefore, a rejection of baptism may bring into question the state of the person's faith.

It is not infrequent that we find in the Gospels Jesus answering questions with questions. Here is one instance:

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" – Mk 4:38, 40

Someone may be afraid of baptism and worried about his salvation. This question crops up in his mind: "Is baptism really necessary for salvation?"

The following imaginary dialogue is worth pondering for the person to personally find his answer to the question.

Questioner: Do I need to be baptised in order to be saved?

Jesus: Do you believe?

Questioner: Yes, I do.

Jesus: Do you read Mk 16:16

Questioner: Yes, I do.

Jesus: Does anyone or anything prevent you from receiving baptism?

Questioner: No

Jesus: **Why are you afraid of not being saved? Go (obey my command) and be baptized, and you will be saved.**

“ We ought to regard the sacrament of baptism with reverence. An ordinance of which the Lord Jesus Himself partook, is not to be lightly esteemed. An ordinance to which the great Head of the Church submitted, ought to be ever honorable in the eyes of professing Christians. ”

J.C. RYLE, THEOLOGIAN AND ANGLICAN BISHOP

It is safe to say that you can be sure of your salvation if you believe and are baptized.



Baptism is seriously much more than a symbolic sacramental rite. Christians are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:

- For the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)
- As an act of initiation into one body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13)

If you believe, but something is holding you back from abiding by the Lord's command on baptism, pray to break down barriers to your decision on baptism.

If you do not believe, then the second part of Mk 16:16 is conclusive. Any mention of baptism would be pointless to the unbeliever.

John Lee

Baptism and Transfers @ Dialect Service on 24th December 2017

