Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Does Water Baptism Save?
Scripture: 1 Peter 3
Code: BQ22211

“when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 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" (1 Peter 3:20b–21)

Certain theological traditions misinterpret Peter’s statement **baptism now saves you** to refer to spiritual salvation by water baptism (i.e., baptismal regeneration). But **baptism** (from *baptizo*) simply means “to immerse,” and not just in water. Peter here uses **baptism** to refer to a figurative immersion into Christ as the ark of safety that will sail over the holocaust of judgment on the wicked. Noah and his family were immersed not just in water, but in the world under divine judgment. All the while they were protected by being in the ark. God preserved Noah and his family in the midst of His judgment, which is what He also does for all those who trust in Christ. God’s final judgment will bring fire and fury on the world, destroying the entire universe (cf. 2 Peter 3:10–12); but the people of God will be protected and taken into the eternal new heavens and new earth (v. 13).

Peter made clear that he did not want readers to think he was referring to water **baptism** when he specifically said **not the removal of dirt from the flesh.** That he was actually referring to a spiritual reality when he wrote **baptism now saves** is also clear from the phrase, **an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** The only baptism that saves people is dry—the spiritual one into the *death* as well as the resurrection of Christ—of those who appeal to God to place them into the spiritual ark of salvation safety (cf. Rom. 10:9–10).

Just as the Flood immersed all people in the judgment of God, yet some passed through safely, so also His final judgment will involve everyone, but those who are in Christ will pass through securely. The experience of Noah’s family in the Flood is also analogous to the experience of everyone who receives salvation. Just as they died to their previous world when they entered the ark and subsequently experienced a resurrection of sorts when they exited the ark to a new post-Flood world, so all Christians die to their old world when they enter the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4–6; Gal. 2:19–20; Eph. 4:20–24). They subsequently enjoy newness of life that culminates one day with the resurrection to eternal life. Paul instructed the Romans:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3–4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:17; 10:2; 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5)

Therefore, God provides salvation because a sinner, by faith, is immersed into Christ's death and resurrection and becomes His own through that spiritual union. Salvation does not occur by means of any rite, including water baptism (**the removal of dirt from the flesh**), **but** by **an appeal to God for a good conscience. Appeal** (*eperotema*) is a technical term that was used in making contracts. Here it refers to agreeing to meet certain divinely-required conditions before God places one into the ark of safety (Christ). Anyone who would be saved must first come to God with a desire to obtain a **good** (cleansed) **conscience** and a willingness to meet the conditions (repentance and faith) necessary to obtain it.

Water baptism does not save; it is the Holy Spirit's baptizing the sinner safely into Jesus Christ—the elect's only ark of salvation—that forever rescues the sinner from hell and brings him securely to heaven. This is the ultimate triumph of Christ's suffering for them, and the pledge of triumph in their own unjust suffering.

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