

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Baptism and Jesus' Resurrection

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:18–22, KJV 1900)

If we read the sentence without the parenthetical insertion, it appears as "*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.*" While baptism does save us, Peter links this saving to the resurrection of Jesus. From early in the second century, you will occasionally read Christian writers who in one way or another confuse the point that Peter here makes. In his First Apology, Justin Martyr suggests that he believed that baptism was in some way associated with eternal salvation. The origin of infant "Baptism" was associated with the idea as well. God's knowledge is infinite and timeless, not in any way limited or increasing. God doesn't learn anything, for He fully knows all things. Knowing the proclivity of humans to wrest His truth, the Holy Spirit directed Peter to include the parenthetical expression in this sentence to clarify the point. While baptism indeed saves those who are baptized, that salvation is not causative, or even contributory to our eternal salvation and the "...putting away of the filth of the flesh." Rather the saving that God invested in baptism relates to "...the answer of a good conscience toward God." Peter's point should clarify the role of baptism for all believers who respectfully study his writings. Peter will not devalue baptism, but he will also not suggest that it is something other than the symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection or that it has the ability to do what only Jesus' death and resurrection can accomplish. The symbol of something describes its object accurately, but the symbol cannot do what the object alone can accomplish. My driver's license cannot drive my car, but it symbolizes that I am licensed to do so.

What is the saving that does occur in baptism? Peter made the same point on the Day of Pentecost that he makes in this passage.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. (Acts 2:40 KJVP)

The promised blessing of baptism (Acts 2:38) Peter tells his Pentecost audience is to "...as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39b) By believing Peter's preaching on that day and by consistently acting on that preaching by being baptized, these people were told that they would save themselves. However, Peter's words in this context specifically identify the nature of that saving, "...from this untoward generation." We don't hear the word "untoward" frequently in our culture. The word conveys the idea of something that is troublesome. "Untoward circumstances forced him to file for bankruptcy." "Untoward means inappropriate, unexpected or unwanted."¹ For first century Jews to demand that Pilate authorize Jesus' crucifixion was as untoward as anything we could imagine, and for the men who heard Peter and the other apostles preaching Jesus and the resurrection on Pentecost to accuse them of being drunk was equally untoward. (Acts 2:13) These religious men not only acted in an untoward manner; Peter describes them as being personally untoward.

By believing Peter's preaching and by showing their belief by repentance and baptism, Peter exhorts those who heard his words and were touched by them to save themselves from the likes of their fellow-countrymen who disrespected Jesus and His disciples' preaching. They didn't save themselves from their sins. They didn't accomplish their new birth. They demonstrated by these godly actions that they were no party of this inappropriate and sinful generation that saw their Messiah and refused to believe in Him.

If Jesus had not died, literally so, He could not have arisen from the dead. And if He had not arisen, all of our faith would be reduced to an empty superstition. (1 Corinthians 15:13-17) Any idea that rejects Jesus' literal bodily death and equally

¹ <http://www.yourdictionary.com/untoward>

literal bodily resurrection denies the faith of the apostles and the inspired writings of the New Testament. In fact, this idea was believed by the ancient gnostics whom both Paul and John refuted, and John categorically confronts and refutes it in his inspired writings. (1 John 4:1-3; John identifies denial that Jesus came "...in the flesh..." that is, with a literal body, as "...the spirit of antichrist," not as God's truth)

As repentance and baptism saved the believing Jews on the Day of Pentecost, so repentance and baptism, directly associated with Jesus' literal bodily life, death, and resurrection also saved Gentile believers from that ancient gnostic heresy.

Paul makes this point in his comprehensive defense of the resurrection.

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? (1 Corinthians 15:29 KJVP)

Nothing in this context in any way suggests surrogate baptism for people who are dead. And everything in this chapter stands on the solid foundation of the One who died and arose from the dead.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3 KJVP)

Being baptized for the dead in this context can only refer to being baptized for Jesus who literally, bodily died and arose from the dead. Paul's question quite personally challenged those people in the Corinthian Church who had been baptized, but now denied the resurrection. His question to them is direct. "Why were you baptized if you do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus?" Their participation in baptism without believing in Jesus and the resurrection was a lie, an empty façade.

Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. Only if we believe that Jesus came in a literal human body, lived in that body, preached in that body, suffered and died in that body, arose from the grave in that body, and ascended into heaven in that body can we validate baptism as an act of godly faith and obedience. Believing anything less rejects New Testament baptism. Believing anything less reduces baptism to nothing more than an empty superstition.

If we follow the pattern of the Day of Pentecost, we preach Jesus and the resurrection. Some who hear our preaching will mock it. Some will question it. And some will be "...pricked in the heart..." by it. Those who feel the stinging prick from our preaching will ask questions and seek more

information to answer their stinging prick in the heart. Our response to them should be the same as Peter's on that day. Their response will not accomplish their new birth or in any way accomplish eternal life for them. The Holy Spirit's prick in the heart cries out for answers, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) And our answer should be the same as Peter's answer on that day. Repent and be baptized. Save yourselves from the crooked, inappropriate generation of wicked unbelievers around you. Stand up and declare by both your repentance and your baptism that you do not walk with them, that you believe the Biblical truth of Jesus and the resurrection.

The answer to the "What shall we do?" question answers Peter's parenthetical point in 1 Peter 3:21, "...not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the **answer** of a good conscience toward God." How does a person experience what Acts 2:37 describes as being "...pricked in their heart"? The point is not dealing with our physical heart, but with the seat of conviction and emotion. Peter's words stung, "pricked," these people in their heart. This sense is likely the same sensation that Peter intends by his reference to a "...good conscience." The answer to that good conscience is the answer that Peter gave to the inquiry of Acts 2:37.

In Romans 2:14-16, Paul refers to the conscience.

(Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) (Romans 2:15 KJVP)

When God in the new birth imparts eternal life to one of His beloved children, He writes His law in their heart, their conscience. There is an immediate reversal of moral values from wicked to righteous. Such a person will likely at that time be confused and bewildered. Questions will flood the mind. What is going on with me? What does this all mean? What should I do? And all of those questions, questions that grow out of a good conscience, one that now responds to God's law written in and on it, will find a satisfactory answer in believing the teachings of Scripture in a faithful gospel, repenting of former sins and sinful attitudes, and, yes, by acting on that conviction by being baptized.

The conscience that cries out for answers is not a lost, hell-bound conscience. Peter emphasizes that it is a "...good conscience." It has good questions. It needs good—Biblical—answers and information. The Bible answer to this good conscience question is not that Jesus died and makes our new birth and eternal salvation possible if we will complete the process by something that we do. The Bible answer proclaims Him and His finished work as wholly successful in putting away our sins and bringing us into eternal, familial

relationship with God—nothing to be added or contributed by us to complete what He has already fully completed.

No, baptism doesn't turn a troubled world into utopia. It doesn't dissolve all our problems, or answer all our questions for that matter. But it does answer one major question, "What shall we do?"

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Worship service each Sunday	10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder	Pastor