

# Is Baptism a Human Work?

## Bible Answers About Salvation

The charge is often made that baptism is excluded from the plan of redemption because it is a "work." And since no one is saved by "works," according to Ephesians 2:9, baptism cannot be essential to salvation.

Is baptism a meritorious human work? Absolutely not. It cannot be a meritorious human work because our Lord commanded it when He said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

The Bible clearly teaches that we are not saved by works. (Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:4-7) Yet the Bible also clearly teaches we are saved by works. "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:24-26KJV) Since the Bible does not contradict itself, it is obvious that two different kinds of works are under consideration in the above passages.

One should be aware that the Bible mentions at least four kinds of works: (1) works of the Law of Moses; (2) works of the flesh; (3) works of human merit; and (4) works resulting from obedience of faith. (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16, 5:19-21; Titus 3:4-7; James 2:14-24) The last category, works resulting from obedience of faith, is often referred to as "works of righteousness." Consider the following passages:

- "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness" (Psalms 119:172 NKJ)
- "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35 NKJ).
- "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, {even} God, has set His seal. They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:27-29 NAS)

Within the context of John 6:27-29, Christ made it crystal clear there are certain works that humans must perform in order to receive eternal life. Jesus was also emphatic when He said, that "believing in Him" itself is a work. Surely one can see that if one is saved without any type of works, then one is saved without faith, because faith is a work.

Repentance is also a work of God that one must perform prior to his/her salvation; Jesus said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) The people of ancient Nineveh "repented" at Jonah's preaching, yet the Old Testament record relates that "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." (Jonah 3:10; Matthew 12:41) Therefore, if one can be saved without any kind of works, one can be saved without repentance.

The same is true of baptism. The New Testament specifically excludes baptism from the class of human meritorious works. If one would study the context of Titus 3:4-7 carefully one would see that we are not saved by works of righteousness that we do by ourselves. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says that this is "according to any plan or course of action that we devised." (p. 526) However, the writer goes on to say that we are saved by the "washing of regeneration" (i.e., baptism), exactly as Peter pointed out when he said, "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." (1 Pet 3:21) Therefore, baptism is excluded from all works of human righteousness that men conceive, but is itself a "work of God" (i.e., required and approved by God) and is necessary for salvation. When one is raised from the watery grave of baptism, it is according to the "working of God", and not any manmade plan (Colossians 2:12).

When we are baptized, we are completely passive, and therefore hardly can have performed any kind of "work." Instead, we have obeyed God through saving faith just as Paul said, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) The "works of God" are the very commands of God, faith, repentance, confession of Jesus as the Christ, and baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to receive salvation as the free gift of God. (Matthew 28:19; Luke 13:3; John 8:24; 1 John 4:2) I would be afraid to make light of any command of God, wouldn't you?

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