

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us”

1 Peter 3:21

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“18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” 1 Peter 3:18-22

Views:

1. Sacramental Approach (Baptismal regeneration)(Kistemaker)

Baptism is a “ceremonial act of physical purification.” Thus, salvation is by baptism or baptism brings salvation. Noah’s family was “saved by water” (Greek “dia” instrumental force “by means of water”). Christians are saved by water baptism.

2. Connection to the rite of circumcision (Dalton, Selwyn)

The Old Testament rite of circumcision is connected to the rite of the New Testament rite of baptism. The wording “removal of dirt from the body” Peter is referring to the rite of circumcision, (Col. 2:11-12).

3. Non-physical baptism (Spirit baptism)(Unger)

Some interpret the “baptism” used here by Peter as not referring to Christian baptism but to “spirit baptism.” Christ was “made alive by the Spirit” (3:18) and that the preincarnate Christ was ministering through Noah by means of the Holy Spirit. “Baptism means ‘immersion’ and there is a baptism that immerses us into Christ as the ark of safety that will sail us over the sea of judgment on the wicked. Noah and his family were immersed not just in water, but in the world under divine judgment.” (MacArthur, however, he doesn’t hold this view)

***4. Spiritual affirmation/symbolic picture** (Kelly, Luther, Wheaton, Raymer, Stein, Blum, Michaels, Barnes, Hiebert)

“Baptism is discussed in light of Noah’s flood experience, describing this earthly expression with a heavenly reality, symbol (Greek “antitupon”), or analogy of a spiritual truth.” (MacArthur) Baptism does not cleanse an individual from his sins, as though baptism and salvation are connected as one single act. Salvation happens first and then those who are saved are baptized. The baptism “delivers” or “saves” us from a non-affirmation toward God and thereby harming our conscience. Baptism allows us to make an “affirmation” (Greek “eperotema”) toward God showing we are tired of sin that dominates us and are thankful for the deliverance from sin and its burden of guilt through the redemption we have in Christ. Baptism is an act of obedience that bears witness to faith in Christ and what He has done for us.

Insights:

1. This passage is one of a few passages people have misunderstood concerning baptism, (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5; 1 Pt. 3:21). Whatever it says must not contradict the Scriptures. “The important hermeneutical principle known as ‘analogia Scriptura’ (the analogy of Scripture) states that no passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture.” (MacArthur) The rest of Scripture teaches that salvation is solely by faith, and not faith plus baptism, (John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:21-30; 4:5; 10:9-10; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 2:16). Paul

never taught that “baptism” was a part of the gospel, (1 Cor. 1:17) and he taught people were saved by faith alone (Rom. 4:4; Eph. 2:8-9).

2. The context of this section of scripture (3:13-22) is “having a clear conscience in light of persecution.” “Noah’s reward for keeping a clear conscience in unjust suffering was the physical salvation of himself and his family, being brought safely through the flood.” (Raymer) It is not teaching us that “water baptism saves us.”

3. Peter uses Noah to explain his point. “Baptism is not a secondary ‘copy’ of the flood waters understood as an ‘archetype’ but simply a present reality of Christian experience to which Peter finds a correspondence in the Noah story.” (Michaels) “Reference to this sphere links the writer in thought with Noah, whose experience of salvation [deliverance] is a striking parallel with that which baptism symbolizes.” (Wheaton) Water Baptism symbolizes a complete break with one’s past life. As the flood wiped away the old sinful world, so baptism pictures one’s break from his old sinful life. “Baptism marked a transition from the state of bondage to a new life.” (Ellicott)

4. Peter uses a comparative distinction “then” (Greek “pote”) and “now” (Greek “nun”). “Peter says that the water of the flood-judgment portrays the water of baptism. Baptism is an antitype (Greek “antitypos”) or counterpart of the type (Greek “typos”). Baptism is the ‘copy,’ the ‘representation,’ or even the ‘fulfillment’ of the Old Testament deliverance from judgment.” (Blum).

5. Baptism does not save us from “sin” as though to remove the filth of fleshly sins, but from a “bad conscience.” The “pledge” (Greek “eperotema”) of a good conscience (Greek “syneideseos”) toward God. “The act of public baptism would ‘save’ them from the temptation to sacrifice their good consciences in order to avoid persecution. For a first-century Christian, baptism meant he was following through on his commitment to Christ, regardless of the consequences.” (Raymer)

6. In this section Peter taught five facts about water baptism: (1.) water baptism of the Christian is different than John the Baptist's baptism of repentance, its spiritual significance is illustrated back with Noah; (2.) water baptism identifies the Christian with Christ showing that they have been delivered from the judgment of God, not that it delivers from it, (1 Peter 3:21); (3.) water baptism testifies of Spirit baptism which brought new life, (1 Peter 3:18); (4.) water baptism clears our conscience from the old life, (1 Peter 3:21); and, (5.) water baptism does not remove sin from the soul or filth from the flesh showing Christian baptism was different than any Jewish and pagan purification rites, (1 Peter 3:21).

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