

- I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
  - A. Today, we are going to deal more fully with Peter's second difficult statement, which is, baptism now saves you. Of course, examining it within its context will give us the best opportunity to understand its meaning and apply it in the way Peter meant it.
  - B. I Peter 3:17-4:2 . . . For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. [18] For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; [19] in which also [in the spirit] He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, [20] who once were disobedient, 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. [21] 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, [22] who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. [4:1] Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.
  - C. Pray
- II. A Difficult to Understand Portion – Baptism now saves you.
  - A. Corresponding to that (*the flood waters which saved Noah*), 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 . . .
  - B. This statement raises two questions that I want to address. First, what does baptism save us from? Second, how does baptism save us?
- III. What does baptism save us from?
  - A. I asked this question last week and alluded to its answer, but today, I want to be clearer and more specific with the answer.
    1. I realize that many of us are prone to think that Peter's words about baptism saving us somehow refer to eternal salvation – which saves

us from the penalty of sin and eternal damnation. I also realize that if this is what we think, we are probably wondering how Peter's words make sense since the Bible and our theology teaches that eternal salvation comes by and through Jesus Christ – alone.

2. So admittedly, at first glance, this statement about baptism saving us seems to raise uncomfortable or even unacceptable theological issues. However, if we keep it within its context and examine it in the light of other scriptures, we will see what Peter means by it.
3. Therefore, if you examine this statement in light of the larger context (*which begins at 2:13, and deals with the exhortation to be humbly submissive and respectful*), and then examine it within the smaller context which is within the larger context (*which begins with 3:17, and deals with the suffering for doing good and the spiritual profit it brings us*), it is apparent that Peter is not talking about eternal salvation, but the ongoing process of sanctification.
4. This is affirmed at the beginning of Peter's letter where he acknowledges that those who are reading it are chosen, which means they have already come to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. And in I Peter 1:18-19, Peter reminds them that they were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ – which further affirms that Christ, not baptism saves us unto eternal life. The rest of Peter's letter is about becoming and ultimately being holy in all our behavior as God is holy. Or in other words, most of Peter's letter is about post salvation growth in godliness, or the part of salvation that has to do with sanctification.
5. Added to this, Peter introduces his words about baptism saving us with the example of the flood waters saving Noah. Now Noah did not gain eternal salvation or his righteous standing before God from the flood waters. He already had right standing before God and was counted as righteous – which is why God asked him to build the ark. The flood waters separated (*saved*) Noah from the rampant evil that filled the earth – saving him from sins ever-present influence and destructive forces – so that Noah could start fresh in raising up a new generation of righteous people living unto God.
6. If we go outside Peter's letter for further help with this, my first source would be Romans 6, where Paul discusses baptism, not as that which saves us from eternal damnation, but as that which separates us from our past enslavement to sin and raises us up to live a godly life the rest of our time on the earth. In that same chapter, Paul

reinforces that baptism is not what saves us from the penalty of sin, for in his closing words, he says: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

7. Therefore, in examining the context of Peter’s words, “baptism now saves you,” and in looking at other scripture sources, we can rightfully conclude that the baptismal salvation Peter is talking about is not eternal salvation, but that part of God’s saving work that breaks sin’s power in us, empowers sanctification, aids growth in godliness, and in a way, kick-starts our transformation from sinner to saint.
  8. Now I realize that many Protestants look on baptism as an act of obedience, a traditional early step in following Christ, a requirement for church membership – or in other words, an action that has no mystical or profoundly spiritual aspects to it. In fact, to imply that baptism has some mystical, life-altering aspects to it is often seen as fringe teaching or theologically unorthodox . However, this is the view that has been taught from the time of the disciples onward, and baptism is still spoken of this way in some church groups today.
- B. Therefore, to give us a clearer understanding of baptism, that is, an understanding that includes the mystical, profoundly spiritual, life-altering aspects of baptism, I want to use two resources:
1. First, I want to use the marriage ceremony coupled with the activity that makes a husband and wife one flesh , because its original ideals and realities are akin to that of baptism.
  2. Second, I want to use Romans 6, because it gives a detailed picture of the spiritual, mystical, and practical aspects of baptism.
- C. The example of the marriage Ceremony and becoming One Flesh:
1. Historically, the marriage ceremony was a life changing event in a boy and girl’s life, for it united them as husband and wife, for life. But the wedding did not stand alone in making the two one, for to complete the union, there had to be that second activity that turned them from a union of two into one flesh.
  2. Now whatever you may think of the wedding ceremony and the activity that makes a husband and wife one flesh, God’s view of it is so exalted that He uses it to describe the mystical and spiritual union of Christ and the Church, which should be reason enough for us to believe that these two earthly actions by a husband and wife, indeed do have a mystical and spiritual nature to them.

3. However, no matter how mystical and spiritual the marriage ceremony and the action of becoming one flesh are, they do not, by themselves, make a good, loving marriage. That requires a significant change to how one lives, along with life-long daily choices and actions which put love for the other above love for self, and the good of the family above the good of self.
4. And yet, a good, loving marriage gets its start with the marriage ceremony and the initial action of becoming one flesh.
  - a. I say this because it is in the marriage ceremony where we publicly, before God, and to each other, proclaim that we have cut our ties with any competing relationships or activities of the past, and where we pledge our love, make our vows – which includes the promise to be faithful, and begin our movement into this new life of husband and wife.
  - b. And it is in the action of becoming one flesh that we become one inseparable person – thus affirming our commitment to life-long faithfulness.
  - c. My point here is that there is a deeply spiritual and profoundly mystical aspect to the marriage ceremony and the activity of becoming one flesh that has, by its very nature, the ability to set into motion a union that will last until death parts it.
5. Sadly, the marriage ceremony, though played out in the most beautiful of settings and with the highest sounding words possible, can be treated as an empty tradition devoid of any mystical and spiritual meaning. In fact in our day, many say their vows and pledge their love while believing the vows can be broken and the marriage ended, if need be. And as for the action of becoming one flesh – it too has lost its noble place of mystically unifying the two into one flesh, as shown by the amount of pre-marital sex and post-marriage unfaithfulness, both mentally and physically, that is carried on by so many today.
6. So what has happened to these two high and noble activities that are intended to radically alter a couple's life until death parts them? Nothing. These high and noble activities are still filled with mystery and spirituality. It is the participants who have changed. It is the participants who treat the ceremony as an empty tradition, and the act of becoming one flesh as a self-pleasing moment of pleasure. And when you do that, you can neither see nor touch the spiritual dimension and mystically unifying oneness of marriage.

7. Yet for those who take the marriage ceremony and the uniting into one flesh seriously – the mystical and spiritual qualities are still there to give the newly married couple a strong, solid start for building a good marriage. And if the couple works, day after day, to put love for the other above love for self, and the good of the family above the good of self, they will attain a marriage that honors God, builds a solid home, and is satisfying and fulfilling for both – which is what God intends marriage to be.
8. My point here is that the marriage ceremony and the action of becoming one flesh can be what God intends them to be, or they can become something far less. And so it is with baptism. From the beginning, baptism has included profoundly mystical and spiritual implications and realities – implications and realities that are intended to effect us the rest of our lives. However, not all treat baptism as it is intended to be treated.

D. The Scripture: Romans 6:1-23

1. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?
  - a. Preceded by: Romans 5:20-21 . . . The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, [21] so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
2. [2] May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?
  - a. The major premise or pre-existing truth that answers the question.
  - b. Then Paul goes on to explain what this pre-existing truth is and how it came to pass or gained its power in the Christian's life.
3. [3] Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? [4] 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.
  - a. Paul begins to explain that the act of baptism has a profoundly mystical and spiritual reality to it, for it is in baptism that the pre-existing truth comes to fulfillment.
  - b. Yet notice Paul's language. He does not say that baptism has a quality or reality that overpowers us and makes us do what God wills us to do – even if it is not what we will to do. Rather, though

Paul points out baptism's intent and impact on the Christian, his language infers that the Christian must exercise his will in doing his part to bring baptism's intentions to reality.

4. [5] For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, [6] knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; [7] for he who has died is freed from sin.
  - a. Again, notice that the certainty of baptism's intent is both in the spiritual and mystical qualities of baptism (God's part) and in us doing our part to live a godly life from that day forward.
5. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, [9] knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. [10] For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.
  - a. Don't think eternal life here, think Christian growth and sanctification – as affirmed by the next verse.
6. [11] Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, [13] and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. [14] For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.
  - a. Again, baptism is not a power that overpowers us and makes us live godly regardless of our will. We must add our part to baptism's mystical and spiritual character, and when we do, baptism works its power.
7. [15] What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! [16] Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?
  - a. I know this is black and white, but this is how God gives it to us and we are wise to wrestle with it until we understand it's either or meaning even though we like to think it is normal for a Christian to be mixed motivated, double minded, and slaves of God, mostly and the devil, occasionally.

8. [17] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
  - a. They repented, were born again, and were baptized.
9. [19] I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.
  - a. Again, notice the emphasis on the part we must play following baptism to bring the intent of baptism and the Christian life to its true fulfillment. Is this not the same in marriage?
10. [20] For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.
  - a. When you were unconverted unbelievers, you had no obligation to obey God, for you were not God's servant, but the devil's.
11. [21] Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. [22] But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
  - a. I want to point out Paul's final statement in this chapter on baptism, for it reminds us that baptism is not our source of eternal salvation – Jesus is. Yet the other 22 verses tell us that baptism is a God ordained initiation or kick-start to a serious Christian life that is committed to being holy in all our behavior, as God is holy.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. So what is it that baptism saves us from? Ourselves, for as Peter says, baptism's saving power is not in the removal of dirt from the flesh, but in our appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, just as the marriage ceremony is the recognized beginning of a new life of commitment, oneness, and love, so baptism is the recognized beginning a new life of working out our salvation in and with Jesus Christ – a new life of dying to self, killing off our fleshly desires, putting on Christ-likeness so we can walk with God, and living for God – in cheerful commitment, oneness, and love.
- B. And for those who know themselves, is this not essential to go from the ways of the world to being one who is humbly submissive and respectful?