

- ***READ Colossians 1:21-23*** I am a big fan of short text that are able to so clearly and concisely convey the simplicity of the Gospel message. There are a number of those texts throughout the New Testament such as **Romans 1:16,17, Galatians 1:3,4, Ephesians 2:1-10**, and so on. And I do believe that this text that we just read together is another example of such a text. These three verses plainly inform us of our sin, the sacrifice of Jesus, the results of His sacrifice, and our need to stay strong in our faiths. How do we know that this is the Gospel? Again this text clearly states it as being so. *"This Gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven..."*
- While not always the case, I would still believe that we could take this simple message of the Gospel into just about any professing Christian church and have them agree that these certainly are the barebones of the Gospel message. However, if we then asked them to dive in a little bit deeper and expound on how one becomes obedient to this Gospel message...well then we would most certainly run into some pushback of some sort. Some would look at us like we are crazy for even thinking that there is any such thing as becoming obedient to the message. They would claim that this isn't a message to be obeyed, but simply a message to believe. Others might say that one needs to pause and say a prayer that allows for God's Spirit to come into our hearts based upon the realization of the truth of this Gospel message. Still others would say that we simply need to wait for God's Spirit to come upon us and work miraculously so that we can at that point then even have a realization of God's will.
- These conversations alone would take some time to unpack, but if we really wanted to just halt the conversation all together...all we would need to do is mention the need for baptism in order for someone to be obedient to the Gospel. If there is any subject on which the Christian world at large can for the most part unite over...it is the unnecessary nature of baptism when it comes to the salvation process. Now, many professing Christians say that baptism has a part in the life of the Christian, but it in no way is a part of the process of someone actually being a Christian. They most definitely would not agree with the belief that Baptism is the working of God that brings one into a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- I'm pretty confident in thinking that I am not the only one who has had such a conversation with a family member, friend, or acquaintance on the subject of baptism, so I want to use our time of study this morning to consider this subject, and to do so from the perspective of whether baptism is the cause of salvation or simply correlated to baptism. Some months back, I ran across an article written by brother Doy Moyer that approached the subject from this perspective, and I found it to be extremely helpful, so I would like to share some thoughts along these lines with you this morning to hopefully help us all be better prepared and equipped to have beneficial conversations with others about this all important subject. Let's begin by looking at the argumentation that might be used by someone who accuses us of misunderstanding the role of baptism in regards to Christianity.

Baptism & Salvation: Causation or Correlation?

I. The Accusations:

A. Anyone who believes that faith demands action must also believe they are earning salvation with the action.

1. If we listen to the teachings of run-of-the-mill Christianity in our world together, it won't take you long to come to understand that faith is nothing more than believing something to be true within your heart. It is this type of watered down faith and easy-beliefism that has been swallowed hook, line, and sinker by so many for so long that has caused so many to become appalled at the suggestion of baptism needing to accompany faith for salvation.

2. In fact, this line of thinking has taken people to a place where they would see anyone who believes anything actually needs to be done for salvation to think that they must do these things in order to earn salvation. It doesn't matter if we try to explain these acts as actions that display trust...no, no, no. These are actions of merit in their minds! And **Ephesians 2:8,9** clearly teach that salvation is not a result of man's power, but God's almighty power.
- B. If God is the cause of salvation, then there can be nothing that we must do in order to be saved or else we are taking glory away from God.**
1. Anything we feel as if we must do is contradictory to the teachings of **Ephesians 2:8,9**, and it must be so for a couple of reasons. Firstly, if we must do something then we hold the power, and building on that...if we must do something then we hold the power and we therefore must be able to receive the glory for the good thing that we have done in our own lives.
 2. This, of course, is completely contradictory to a foundational aspect of the Bible which is the truth that God alone is worthy of true glory, honor, and praise. After all, it was God who sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins when we were helpless sinners and enemies of God. (**Romans 5:6-11**) Any responsibility in our hands would cause us to no longer be helpless and thus it would contradict Scripture.
- C. Therefore, believing baptism is necessary for salvation is believing that our actions are the cause of salvation which makes salvation a man-centered process and not God-centered.**
1. Take all of this together, and we must come to the conclusion that anything that takes the responsibility or power away from God is bad. To give each person responsibility in the salvation process would be to give each person some sort of power, and that giving of power would no longer make salvation about God and therefore stripping Him of His deserved glory.
 2. If salvation is all about God then we must simply do whatever takes all of the responsibility off of our shoulders and allow God to do it all. We must not be responsible to do anything or else salvation will no longer be caused by God and centered around His glory.

While I can most certainly appreciate my family members, friends, and acquaintances who truly want to make sure that God receives all of the glory due His high and holy name...I must respectfully disagree with their notion that responsibility equals causation. They claim that if I have the responsibility to make a decision to do something then I have all of the power and I am deserving of the glory for my salvation. But friends, I would like for us to consider from **Colossians 2:11-13** that all of the power that is found in baptism is found outside of ourselves.

II. The Biblical Reality According To Colossians 2:11-13:

- A. Circumcision & baptism are compared for the fact that each include the putting off of something. (11)**
1. I have heard it said before and maybe you have as well that baptism and the circumcision of the Old Testament, especially under the Law of Moses, are direct one to one equivalents, but I don't believe that can be substantiated from this text. Instead, I do believe we can establish one rock solid shared trait between physical circumcision and baptism, and that shared trait is that each of these two actions result in the putting off of something. Physical circumcision is the removal of flesh where as baptism is also described as the *"putting off of the body of flesh."*
 2. What exactly does this mean? I believe Paul gives greater clarity to this type of putting off of the flesh language in **Romans 6:3-7**. In this text, Paul is reminding the Romans that their baptism was the point at which they were baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. This being united in the likeness of His death was the point when *"our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died to sin is freed from sin."*

3. We can only conclude that it is at the point of baptism that our body of ruled by sin was buried and cut off away from us so that we would no longer be under its control or have the guilt of our sins hanging over us. We are forgiven of and freed from those past sins because they have been cut off and put away from us at the point of our baptism. **(v.13)** But that isn't the only incredible thing that happens when we are baptized.
- B. It is in baptism that we are *"raised with Him..."* (12)
1. Paul goes on to state that it is also at the point of baptism that *"you were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him..."* This leaves us with a second thing that baptism is being compared to, and this time it is being raised. We can see that pretty clearly just from the act of baptism where someone is immersed in water and is raised up from the water, but how is it that we are raised with Christ in baptism?
 2. Again, Paul addresses this very thing in **Romans 6:4,5**. *"Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.**"* These texts together clearly show us that it is at the point of baptism when we die to our sins, they are put away from us, and then we are raised to new life freed from the power of that sin and the guilt it brings upon us.
- C. We must believe & trust that the same power God showed in raising Jesus from the dead will raise us to life & forgive us of our sins. (12,13)
1. If these two previous points are true, which I believe them to be based upon the evidence of this text and **Romans 6**...then the question becomes, *"Whose power is at work for our body of sin to be put off and for us to be raised from death to life? Who are we putting our trust in?"* I don't know about you, but the answers to these questions seem pretty clear in this text of **Colossians 2:11-13**. *"You were also circumcised in him with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith **in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses.**"*
 2. It seems abundantly clear that Paul is identifying baptism through faith to be the point when we are forgiven of our sins, and he also clearly states that all of this is done through the working of God. He is the One who made us alive together with Christ! The subject of this text is baptism, and the inspired Apostle correlates baptism with the forgiveness of sins and the giving of a new life.
 3. And wouldn't you know that this again is the message that is found in **Romans 6:4**. *"Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.**"* The subject at hand is baptism and Paul is stating that the same power and glory of God that raised Jesus from the literal grave is the same power and glory that raises us from the watery grave. These are the truths that we must believe and trust if we want to have the powerful working of God acting upon us when we are baptized through faith.

III. Our Conclusions:

A. God's powerful working is the **cause** of salvation.

1. Remember, the accusation is that the position of baptism being necessary for salvation is automatically deemed as a position where we are putting ourselves as the source of salvation because we are making the decision to be baptized. However, in no way does Paul show this

to be the case when it comes to pure baptism through faith as described in **Colossians 2:11-13**. Though Paul is saying that it is at the point of baptism that our body of sin is cut off from us and we are raised to new life (as agreed upon in **Romans 6**), He clearly states that it is God who is working and not ourselves. He is at work, and He alone has made us alive with Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of our sins.

2. The outcry is often that we are violating the truths of **Ephesians 2:8,9**, but Paul is, again, clearly showing in this text that it is not of ourselves that we are saved, but it is totally and completely a working of God through His glorious mercy and grace.

B. Baptism through faith is only correlated with salvation.

1. Therefore, we can only conclude that baptism is correlated with baptism because it is at that moment that these incredible things happen. I firmly believe that our sins are washed/cut away, the dead man is buried, and the new man is raised at the point of baptism done through faith. But that does not mean that I believe there is something special about the water or that I or anyone else is earning/has earned our forgiveness and salvation.
2. Those who submit to a baptism in which they believe they are being worked upon by God must truly trust that God is doing just as His Word says He will do. The one being baptized is not trusting in self, but it is truly one of the greatest acts of submission that can be done. We submit to baptism not because we believe it is special, but we submit to it because we believe our God is special, and He can save us through even the most simple of means.

With all of this being seen and understood, I would suggest to each of us and I would suggest to your family, friends, and acquaintances that we would all do well to simply accept what God has revealed to us in Scripture concerning where the power of salvation lies and how we come to experience that power. We must not allow for theologies of men to distort the true message of how God has determined for us to be saved. Yes, He has established baptism through faith to be the moment at which our sins are forgiven and we are raised to new life, but all of the power still comes from God and His gracious working. Though many might conclude in their own minds that this just can't be...we must be content with these Biblical truths being so if we want to truly bring glory to the name of God. May we all humble ourselves before Him in trusting obedience so that His mercy and grace can wash us white as snow and reconcile us back into His fellowship.