

What is the Baptism that Saves?

By C. D. Cole

Matthew 3:15, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and earnest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

The scriptures emphasize, from Genesis to Revelation, that salvation is by faith. In the last analysis, all religions teach and everybody believes in salvation by faith. Faith means trust, and something must be trusted for salvation. In other words, man must have something to depend upon, something to look to for acceptance with God. This makes the object of trust of vital importance. There are many things people look to or depend upon for acceptance with God, but only one object of saving faith. Some depend upon their works; some on a sinful man like themselves, some on an ordinance, some on mere attribute of divine mercy. There are many, many things that are trusted in vain, but only one object of saving trust.

Everybody is hoping in something for escape from hell. Everybody has some hope of keeping out of eternal fire. Everybody expects to be saved some time or other in some way or other. Nobody deliberately chooses to burn forever.

My subject affirms there is a baptism that saves. It does not affirm that any and every baptism saves, but that there is a particular baptism that saves. And if there is a baptism that saves, that baptism must be the object of trust and hope.

It is not the baptism of the sinner in water that saves. To deny this is to take issue with large portions of professing Christianity. But we deny that water baptism saves, and are ready to give reason for the hope that is in us. We deny any saving efficiency to water baptism:

1. Because of the subject to be baptized. Baptism is for believers only, and the believer is already saved.

John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

John 3:14, 15, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Acts 16:31, "...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved, and thy house."

I John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him."

Baptism is for the saved. The pastor is looking for someone to baptize. There are only two groups to choose from: saved and lost. From which group will he take them? from the saved group or the lost group? The answer is obvious.

2. Because baptism is no part of the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. Paul gives a definition of the gospel in I Corinthians 15:1, 3,4,

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel...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."

3. Because Paul thanked God that he had baptized only a few in Corinth; about as many as he could count on his fingers.

I Corinthians 1:14-18, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

Paul had preached the gospel and they had believed and were saved.

4. Because of the design of baptism. Baptism is not a sacrament with saving efficacy; it is a symbol of what does save. It symbolized the believer as being dead to sin through his legal union; union in law with Christ. Through faith in Christ we are dead to guilt of sin and alive unto God. We are dead to guilt because Christ died in our place. Our old man was crucified with Him. The old man does not mean the old nature, for it is not a subjective experience, but a legal act that is meant. The old man is the man of old; the person I was under law, cursed by it and awaiting execution. As a believer in Christ I can look back at the cross and see the sentence executed against me in Christ. I, the old man, the man I was under condemnation, was crucified with Christ. He had the guilt of my sin upon Him and died under it. But He also survived the ordeal and arose from the dead, and I arose with Him, Now the purpose of baptism is to symbolize all this in a burial and resurrection. Baptism does not kill us to sin and make us alive unto God, but it is a striking symbol of what we are in Christ. In Him we are dead to sin because His death was our death. In Christ we are alive unto God; His life is our life. This is not something

to be felt but something to be reckoned; something to be counted as true by faith in His word. If He says I am dead, I will count it as true. If He says, I am alive, I will reckon it as so. Reason may argue, But, I do not feel dead. But feelings have nothing to do with it. It was God's judicial act in accepting what Christ did as if I had done it. The wages of sin is death; such a death as represents a curse; for the law says cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree. Crucifixion was the kind of death that speaks of the curse.

Galatians 3:13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

NOT THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The baptism that saves is not the baptism in the Holy Spirit:

1. Because of the design of the Holy Spirit baptism. It was not for salvation but for power. In every case of Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament it was associated with the miraculous.

Acts 2:1-6, 11, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language...we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God."

This passage shows the Jews received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:14-16, "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) "

This passage shows the Samaritans received it.

Acts 10:44-48, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

This passage shows Romans at Caesarea received it.

Acts 19:1-7, "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? and they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

This passage shows the disciples at Ephesus received it. And in every case, there was the miraculous speaking in tongues. It is not said the Samaritans spake in tongues, but when the Holy Spirit fell on them there was some sort of manifestation or sign, for even Simon Magus saw it and wanted the power.

I Corinthians 14:22, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe."

2. Because of the subjects of Holy Spirit baptism. Holy Spirit baptism in every case was for believers. The Holy Spirit baptism was promised to believers. The one hundred twenty who were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit were saved. In the case of the Samaritans, they had been converted under Philip's preaching. They had been converted and baptized in water. Then Peter went, laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. We must distinguish between gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and the Holy Spirit as a gift. In the case of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit fell on him as Peter began to speak. But he was a believer before the Holy Spirit fell. Paul says, God which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He said unto us and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 'So the baptism that saves is neither water nor Spirit baptism. It is not the baptism of the sinner in anything, The baptism that saves is the baptism of the Savior. The Bible speaks of baptism in water, baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire. It also speaks of baptism as a figure of suffering.

John was baptizing in Jordan. He was baptizing people who came to him confessing their sins. He refused to baptize anyone else.

Matthew 3:13-14, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? " John was baptizing sinners and could not think of Jesus as a sinner. Verse 15, "And Jesus answering

said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

Now, the question is, How could John's baptism of Jesus be the fulfillment of all righteousnesses? It seems obvious that it could not actually fulfill all righteousness. The Son of God came to this earth to fulfill all righteousness and that was actually done by His obedience unto death. He came to provide righteousness for the unrighteous. He came to provide righteousness for us poor sinners, who had no righteousness of our own. Righteousness is based upon obedience, and ours was not a record of obedience, but the opposite. If we were to become righteous, it would have to be on the righteousness of another; someone to answer for us by obedience unto death. And this Jesus came to do just that. His water baptism fulfilled all righteousness typically. It adumbrated another baptism which would actually fulfill all righteousness. It was a prophecy and pledge of the cross. Christ's water baptism looked forward to Calvary, just as ours looks back to Calvary. Christ's water baptism pointed to His baptism of suffering.

THE BAPTISM THAT SAVES

Christ's baptism on the cross is the baptism that saves. And that is the baptism that must be trusted. Whatever saves must be the one and only object of trust.

On his last trip to Jerusalem, Christ informed His disciples of His approaching death.

Matthew 20:20-23, "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the

baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

Our Lord here speaks of His coming death under the figure of baptism. In Luke 12:50 Jesus says,

"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

Here Christ speaks of His coming death under the figure of a baptism. The baptism that saves was our Lord's baptism of suffering. And on the cross he fulfilled all righteousness with an obedience unto death. It was at Calvary he wore the righteous robe of righteousness which is imputed to poor sinners who trust Him. On the cross He bare his back to the law of justice that we sinners might rejoice in God's love. On the cross He suffered that we might not perish. On the cross He died that we might have life everlasting. Christ was made perfect through suffering.

John 12:23, 24, "And Jesus answered them, saying... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

The Savior must be more than a sinless person; He must also be a suffering person. Here is where the Jews have missed the way: they looked only for a glorious Messiah. They turned their ears from Scriptures that spoke of the suffering servant, Jehovah. Even to this day they refuse to read in public the 53rd Psalm. Peter tells us that the prophets testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. The cross is the place of salvation. Water baptism was the pledge and prophecy of His sufferings on the cross. Our

baptism in water looks back as a symbol of His death and resurrection. The baptismal pool that actually washes away sin is on Calvary.

**"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.
The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.
E'er since by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be, till I die.
When in a nobler sweeter song,
I'll sing thy power to save;
When this poor lisping stammering tongue,
Lies silent in the grave."**