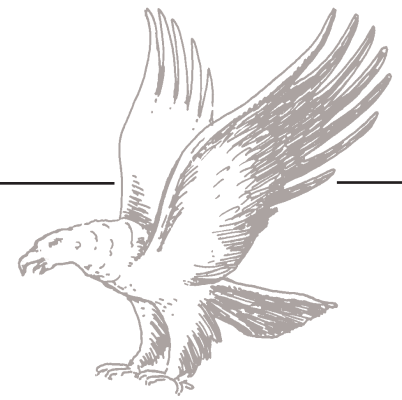


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



June 22, 2014

Baptismal Regeneration?

We are often accused of believing that salvation is found in the water of baptism. That's a bogus charge. But perhaps we contribute to the misunderstanding by minimizing two other key conditions.

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Ac. 22:16).

“. . . according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5)



“Baptismal regeneration” is often used as a pejorative against those of us who believe that baptism is required for salvation. The charge implies that we see salvation as a product of water rather than God's grace.

Paul's phrase “washing of regeneration” suggests that baptism is indeed linked to salvation. We could trot out comments from a number of scholars to defend that interpretation.

But a more useful approach would be to examine the Biblical concept of *conditional gifts*. A conditional gift is an undeserved favor that is conditioned upon some simple token of faith from the recipient. The Bible provides numerous examples of this. Noah was saved from the flood by the grace of God—but

he had to build an ark. Naaman the leper was healed by God—but not until he dipped seven times in the Jordan River. God gave Jericho to Israel as a prize—but they had to march around the city and blow trumpets to receive it. In all these, the outcome was certainly a gift from God; but the gift was attached to a condition. Their obedience did not merit the gift; rather, it was *an act of faith in response to a divine promise*.

If we can understand the idea of a conditional gift in these cases, then the concept of baptism as necessary for salvation should be easy to grasp. If God has identified baptism as essential to salvation—and He clearly has (Mk. 16:16; Ac. 2:38; Ac. 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21; etc.)—then it is not worshipping water to insist that one must be baptized to be saved.

Having said all that, however, we sometimes unwittingly confirm our critics' charge that we believe in water salvation, by focusing our attention almost exclusively on baptism to the neglect of other conditions.

Note that baptism has two essential prerequisites: faith (Mk. 16:16) and

repentance (Ac. 2:38). If either one is missing, then getting dunked in water is meaningless.

For example, if someone expresses shame for his past and wants to start a new life by being baptized, he has clearly repented. But if he further explains that, due to his Muslim background, he cannot accept the idea of Jesus as anything other than a prophet—certainly not the son of God, crucified and resurrected—then there is no faith, and baptism would be pointless.

Likewise, if someone confesses his belief that Jesus is the Son of God and desires to be baptized, faith is certainly present. But if he shrugs off any discussion of sin, insisting that he is a good person and has done nothing all that bad in his life, then where's repentance? Baptism “for the remission of sins” can't happen if the candidate feels no remorse for sin in his life.

“Have you been baptized?” is a valid question to ask of those who wish to come to the Lord. But there are two other questions that we should ask first, if our goal is to bring people to Christ.

— David King