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Sundays

9:30am - Bible Study

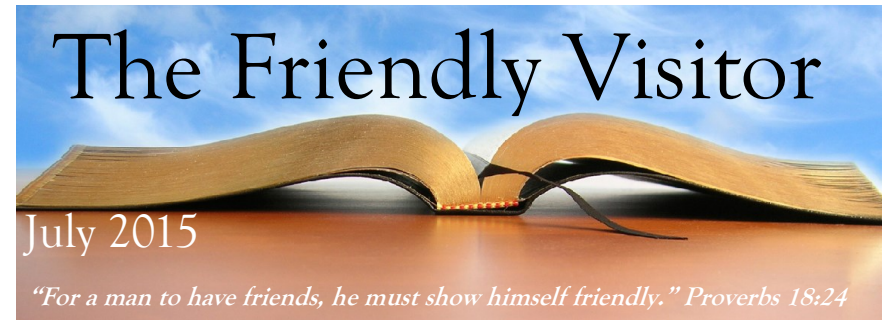
10:20am & 5pm - Worship

Wednesdays

7pm - Bible Study

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Have I Overemphasized Baptism?

John R. Gibson

For more than thirty years I have preached immersion in water as an essential act of obedience for those who wish to be saved. I have proclaimed Jesus as the “author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9), and contended that one of the things Jesus commands is baptism. Through the years I have concluded very few sermons without at least some effort to exhort any who have not been baptized to do that very thing, but have I been mistaken? My evangelical friends and neighbors have always insisted I was wrong to insist upon the necessity of baptism, but increasingly there are even some within Churches of Christ who either openly minimize the necessity of baptism, or at least suggest that we should be talking about it less. Some go so far as to say people like me are majoring in minors with our emphasis on baptism, while others simply say we need to deemphasize it a little and talk about other things more.

What should I do? Should I repent of my “overemphasis of a Church of Christ Tradition?” Should I stop being so emphatic about linking baptism and salvation? To understand the answer to those questions, let's carefully consider the following.

If Jesus linked something to His authority, discipleship, and the observation of His commands, shouldn't we emphasize that, whatever it is? Consider how He did do that very thing with baptism in Matt. 28:18-20. “*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have*

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“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” Acts 17:11



commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

If the Lord Jesus Christ, the very epitome of grace, were to associate a physical act with being saved would it not be wrong to fail to stress its importance to all who would hear? Though many contend some of us have overemphasized baptism, it was the risen Savior who linked baptism to salvation in Mark 16:16. *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

Take a moment to compare the following two verses which mention the remission of sins. *“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins”* (Matt. 26:28). *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 2:38). It seems more than a little strange to realize all who claim to believe the words of the New Testament agree the blood of Jesus should be emphasized, but many of those same people will turn around and deny the importance of baptism, an act said to have the same intended purpose. To deemphasize baptism is to deemphasize the remission of sins, and to deemphasize the remission of sins is to deemphasize the shedding of Christ’s blood.

If we learned from the New Testament that a man fasted and prayed for three days and then was told that he could wash away his sins in baptism, would that cause baptism to take on a greater importance in our eyes? The story of Saul’s conversion is found in both Acts 9 and Acts 22, and in Acts 22:16 we read of a certain disciple named Ananias, who was sent by Jesus (Acts 9:10-16), saying the following, *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

While no one would think it be right to deemphasize an action said to be “into Christ Jesus” and “into His death,” the implications of Rom. 6:3 need to be carefully considered when looking at the relative importance of baptism. *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”* From this passage could we not reasonably argue that to minimize baptism would minimize Christ Jesus and His death?

Before deciding it is okay to downplay baptism, we should also consider Gal. 3:26, 27—*“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put*

on Christ.” And I think it would be appropriate to allow one of the Lord’s apostles to weigh in with the following from 1 Pet. 3:21, *“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....”*

Let’s ask the questions again.

What should I do? I should strive to preach the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) which clearly includes the message that baptism is essential. Certainly I must preach God’s grace and mercy, and I must teach all things He has commanded (Matthew 28:20), but I cannot cease preaching baptism and please the One who possesses all authority.

Should I repent of the overemphasis of a “Church of Christ Tradition?” To dismiss baptism with such a prejudicial epithet is to ignore the words of Jesus, along with those of His apostles and prophets. Baptism is not a church tradition, but a divine command.

Should I stop being so emphatic about linking baptism and salvation? The truth is I am not the one who linked the two—Jesus did. “Saved,” “remission of sins,” “wash away your sins,” and “saves” are not my words, but the words of Scripture.

If you are reading this and have never been baptized for the remission of your sins and thereby entered into and put on Christ, won’t you do that? Please do not be misled; baptism is not a Church of Christ Tradition, but a vital part of God’s plan for you.

If you have any questions or comments on this article please contact us.

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“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 2:38