

Biblical Baptism – No. 7

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Protestantism generally denies that baptism is a condition of salvation from sin. It often does so, averring that it is a “work,” and one cannot be saved by one’s own works.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that one **cannot** be saved by “works”: “For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **not of works**, that no man should glory” (Eph. 2:8–9, *emph. added*). Just as clearly, however, the Bible teaches that one **is** saved by “works”: “Ye see that **by works a man is justified**, and not only by faith...even so **faith apart from works** is dead” (Jam. 2:24–26, *emph. added*). Since the Bible does not contradict itself, we must conclude that Paul and James wrote of different kinds of “works,” for salvation requires works of some sort.

Paul identified the works of which he wrote as those which are “of yourselves” in which one could “glory.” Similarly, he further stated the futility of seeking salvation by such works: “Not by **works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves**, but according to his mercy he saved us...” (Tit. 3:5a, *emph. added*). No one can be morally good (i.e., “righteous”) enough or do enough good works to boast, “I have saved myself from sin and condemnation. God owes it to me.”

When James wrote that one **is** saved by works, what sort of “works” did **he** mean? The context indicates that he referred to **works of obedience to God**, which one’s faith causes him to do. He cited Abraham and Rahab as examples of those who were justified before God by such obedient faith (Jam. 2:21, 25). The Bible ever enjoins faith-actuated obedience, requiring our works in response, as necessary to salvation: “And having been made perfect, He [Christ] became **unto all them that obey** Him the author of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9, *emph. added*; cf. Mat. 7:21; et al.).

Is baptism a work of which one can boast, or is it an act of obedience to Christ, based upon one’s faith? The Bible teaches that it is the latter. After stating that one is saved by God’s mercy, rather than by one’s “works of righteousness” (as noted above), Paul then wrote that God saves men “through the **washing of regeneration** and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5b, *emph. added*). The only thing in the New Testament to which *the washing of regeneration* can refer is baptism. Notice that Paul **excluded** it from being a “work of [man’s own] righteousness,” but rather identified it with **God’s merciful plan of salvation**. One who is

properly taught will trust in the “working of God,” not in his own works, in baptism (Col. 2:12).
Baptism is not a work of merit.

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