

## BAPTISM AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

“Baptized into Christ” must be considered as faith and not be understood as some arbitrary command of God to test our willingness to obey Him. Only when baptism is understood to be faith can it agree with Paul’s purpose of proving that justification is by faith in Christ. Specifically, baptism needs to be seen as having the meaning of trust in Christ as Savior.

**a. Paul wrote Galatians to prove that we are sons of God through faith in Christ and not by law - contrary to the legalists who advocated justification by law-keeping.** Notice how he so strongly emphasized this truth.

2:16 — nevertheless knowing **that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may **be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law**; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh justified.

2:21 — “I do not nullify the grace of God, **for if righteousness comes through law**, then Christ died needlessly.

3:6-9 — “Even so Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is **those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham**. The Scripture, foreseeing that **God would justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, “all nations shall be blessed in you. So, then **those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham**, the believer.”

3:26 — **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**

3:27-9 — **For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And **if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring**, heirs according to promise.

**b. Galatians 3:27 was not given as a treatise on baptism.** He was discussing justification by faith. The only way we can understand his meaning in verse 27 is within the context in which it was written. Why did Paul mention baptism? How does it fit into his main theme (Gal. 2:16)? It is in the context of justification by faith in Christ that the apostle wrote: **“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”** (3:27). But this statement is preceded by **“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (verse 26). If the meaning of baptism were not classified as faith in Christ, it would be irrelevant to Paul’s argument. If verse 27 is not to be equated with verse 26 then Paul’s reference to baptism is both irrelevant and confusing because then he would be introducing a condition of justification in addition to the principle of faith. But, the apostle in verse 27 is still teaching justification by faith in Christ as opposed to salvation by law-keeping.

So, what does baptism mean? It means more than simply immersion in water. It means faith in Christ. It is not just that baptism is to be preceded by belief that Jesus is the Son of God. Baptism is a commitment by faith in Jesus who offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

If baptism were only a command of God chosen to test our willingness to obey, and not seen as trust in Christ as savior; if it were to be submitted to just because Jesus commanded it, that would be legalism

(making baptism a work of righteousness we do). But, when we see baptism to be the God-ordained embodiment of faith by which we are united with Christ, then it becomes consistent with Galatians' theme of justification by faith.

If the so-called "plan of salvation" means a set of arbitrary commands given by one in authority, and the one who obeys it is rewarded with salvation, then those commands become pure legalism.

**c. Baptism must not be separated from faith in Christ to save us.** To make it a command or ordinance based solely upon the authority of Christ to test man's willingness to obey him is a return to legalism. Baptism considered as the embodiment of faith in Christ as our sin offering does not constitute a work of legalism. The only way to properly defend baptism as a prerequisite to salvation is to understand it as faith; that is, reliance upon Christ as the sin offering.

One being baptized should have his eyes on the cross, not merely on the act of being immersed in water. We have to be very careful to not transmit the idea that faith leads to repentance and repentance leads to baptism and that baptism as an act of obedience is separate and apart from faith. That thinking would be legalism.

**d. In baptism we are clothed with Christ.** "In Christ" and "into Christ" signify union with Christ. To try to be justified by law (by merit or by doing righteous deeds) is to be "severed from Christ" (Galatians 5:4), but to be justified by faith (embodied in baptism) means union with Christ. This is the apostle's argument in Galatians 3:26, 27. Baptism can't be understood apart from faith in Christ as sin offering. Simply to quote Galatians 3:27 to prove the necessity of baptism is to fail to consider it in its proper context. Galatians 3:26, 27 shows baptism to be faith embodied, expressed or pictured. Through our faith in Christ as the sacrifice for our sins, baptism results in us coming into Christ and being clothed with Christ. Clothed with Christ, covered by Christ's righteousness and not our own, entering into Christ, coming into a saving relationship with Christ – all this happens by or through our faith in him when we are baptized.

**e. Conclusion:**

Being baptized just to obey some command of God and not for the purpose of receiving forgiveness and thus salvation through the meritorious death of Christ on the cross turns baptism into a work and therefore a form of legalism. We are not saved by any of our own works of righteousness but by faith in Christ.

The Lord gave many commands. For example, "give to him who asks you and do not turn away he who would borrow from you". This is a command. To think that by obeying this command one may unknowingly be saved, would negate **Eph. 2:8-9**: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." It would also negate **Titus 3:5**: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." This would be obedience to a command but not directly connected to faith in Christ to save nor the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The latter is the baptism the New Testament writers said was necessary to be saved.