

REFUTING BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

Someone recently wrote me and asked...

“A friend told me water baptism is required to be saved, though I believe baptism is important and is commanded by Jesus, I don't think baptism is necessary to be saved. Am I wrong?”

I responded...

Your friend is promoting a doctrine commonly referred to as ‘*Baptismal Regeneration*’, which, of course, is false. This erroneous doctrine originated with the *Roman Catholic Church* and is likewise promoted by such Protestant sects as ‘*Oneness Pentecostals*’ and the ‘*Church of Christ*’.

So yes, I agree with your assessment, but I might use different language in my denunciation of this heresy. Remember, the theological term "regeneration" refers to the new birth, or the N.T. experience of being born-again, which basically represents Christian conversion. A basic understanding of these terms will be important for thoroughly answering your question.

Allow me to explain by offering you the following two-part Scriptural analysis...

1. An explanation of your friend’s proof text, namely *Mark 16:16*.
2. A brief Scriptural rebuttal for the heresy known as ‘*Baptismal Regeneration*’.

So, first, let’s look at what *Jesus* said in...

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Perhaps, for many, this verse may come as a surprise. Notice, Jesus didn't say that he who believes and is saved should then be baptized. But rather, He put it the other way

around. He who believes and is baptized, he said, shall be saved. Now, it's only at our peril that we change something that Jesus said into something that he did not say. Everything He says matters, and He means every word of it. However, if this is so, then it must be that only by having faith in Him and being baptized, among other things, are we saved. Some will be puzzled at this.

“*What do you mean?*” they may protest (*and I can understand their concern*).

Don't be confused, and certainly, don't blame me, for these are not my words, but His.

It is Him, who, as we see here, laid down the order: faith, then baptism, then salvation. We must not reverse it to faith, salvation, baptism, however much we might prefer it that way. What Jesus said must stand, and we must take heed, yet, what exactly does *Jesus'* words mean?

You may wonder, “*Bro. Britt, I thought you did not believe in baptismal regeneration?*”

I don't, but remember, *Jesus* did not say, “*Believe and be baptized and thou shalt be born again.*” And since he said no such thing, we have no need to believe in baptismal regeneration: it is another gospel, a false gospel. His words are: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*”. Therefore, what we must believe is not *baptismal regeneration*, but *baptismal salvation*. And this is something all together different as I will explain. What then is meant by *baptismal salvation*? To answer this we must first understand what is meant by the word ‘*salvation*’. So, often, I'm afraid our views on the doctrines of ‘*salvation*’ and ‘*regeneration*’ are jumbled. When we fail to make a distinction between these two, a great theological confusion ensues. Regeneration is where we start with *Jesus*, salvation is where we end.

Matthew 10:22 ...but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

All men, without exception, who endure unto the end and partake of full salvation must be born-again. But all who are born-again may not necessarily realize salvation (because all may not endure, many fall-away, refusing to continue in the faith). Thus, if a man refuses Christ's command to be baptized he is refusing to follow *Jesus*, and therefore, cannot rightly be called His disciple.

Luke 14:27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

In other words, a refusal or willful neglect to follow Christ in water baptism, reveals either a spurious or faltered conversion. Thus, water baptism, is the first act of obedience, the first fruit, if you will, inspired by regenerating faith. There is no power in the water, it is only symbolic, an identification with Jesus, His crucifixion, His burial, and His resurrection. It is not the water that literally carries any heavenly power, but faith in what Jesus commanded.

You may ask, “*Is it then a mere formality, a dead ritual, void of any spiritual experience?*” No, remember Naaman the leper? When he was told by Elisha to dip seven times in the Jordan, at first he refused, but eventually obeyed, and was healed. But there was no mysterious power in the muddy waters of the Jordan. Naaman was healed because He did exactly what God commanded him to do, in exactly the way God commanded him to do it. In like manner, the blind man Jesus told to bath in the pool of Silaom, no healing virtue in the waters of that pool. And so it is, there are spiritual benefits for the obedient disciple who, by faith, obeys Christ's command to be water baptized. Water baptism, is, essentially, an outward indicator of an inward reality. So, do you see? We may believe the Bible by saying we believe in ‘*baptismal salvation*’, but not ‘*baptismal regeneration*’. In other words, water baptism is not a prerequisite for a man to be born-again, but if someone willfully refuses to be baptized, it is an indicator they are not truly born-again, and thus, will not endure unto salvation. I hope this makes sense.

Next, how can the false doctrine of ‘*Baptismal Regeneration*’ (*which apparently your friend holds to*) be Scripturally refuted?

The answer is found in two passages of Scripture, *John 14:17* and *Acts 10:44-48*.

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Jesus set forth a spiritual absolute in...

John 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

When *Jesus* used the term ‘*world*’ here, He is speaking of unbelievers, those who are not born-again. Moreover, when He spoke of the ‘*Spirit of truth*’ He is obviously talking about the Holy Spirit. Thus, *Jesus* clearly establishes that no unbeliever, sinner, or unregenerate person can either receive or know the Holy Ghost.

Now, consider the initial outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Gentiles in Acts 10.

Cornelius and His household, after believing the gospel preached by Peter, received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. This is irrefutable. Now, notice the question the *Apostle Peter* asked in verse 47...

Acts 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Peter is now suggesting that Cornelius and his company be baptized in water, but *after they received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost*.

How does this overthrow the false doctrine of ‘*baptismal regeneration*’? Because Cornelius and the others were clearly already born-again because they received the Holy Ghost. As Jesus declared in *John 14:17*, the *unbeliever cannot receive or know God's Spirit* like these Gentiles did in *Acts 10*. Obviously, Cornelius and the others, after hearing and believing the gospel, were born-again, otherwise, the Spirit would have never filled any of them. Hence, if water baptism was a condition for men to get born-again, then the Gentiles would have first had to be water baptized before they would have ever been filled with the Spirit. Amen?

Sorry for my lengthy response, but it's always best, in my opinion, to thoroughly address every issue with *God's Word*.

Many blessings in Jesus,
Bro. Britt