

## **Dunkin' Do-Nots!**

I found this week's study of the Sacrament (or Ordinance) of Baptism fascinating, and it reminded me of so many questions and internal friction spawned by this simple and yet critical Christian function! Dip or dunk? Necessary for salvation? Public or private? Prescriptive or Descriptive?

Baptism was prescribed from the beginning and had a presence in ancient Israel and pagan rituals, but what purpose does it serve for contemporary Christianity? Humanmade doctrine varies, and you'll find it an act that imparts grace on the newly-born and old alike for the sacramental-minded. And there, a sprinkle is likely to be just as effective as a complete dunking as long as an individual ordained in the particular sect or denomination performs the rite. On the other hand, you'd be more likely to find baptism an ordinance of immersion and more of a symbolic act of burial and resurrection than an impartation of Godly grace if you're of a Protestant persuasion. Which is correct, and does the function impact the salvation of those being doused or dunked?

What the Bible makes clear: Baptism in our New Testament context is meant to represent the forgiveness of sin and symbolize rebirth in Christ. It provided accountability, at least in the beginning, through the public profession of faith – often in the face of possible martyrdom. But that the ritual is necessary for salvation is unlikely; that idea may be part of a misunderstanding of salvation and a focus on praxis as opposed to the heart.

First of all, and contrary to our contemporary desire, the Bible teaches us that salvation – a rescuing by definition – will be a stay from God's future wrath (e.g. 1Peter 1:3-5). Second, Jesus had a lot to say about our heart (intent) and the idea of choosing and following. And, Paul seems to corroborate the concept of persevering in our covenant with God. Finally, the Bible and this week's lectures confirm that our confession of choice is synonymous with a 'dying to self,' and dying is indeed necessary before burial and resurrection baptism symbolizes. So, while it may not be directly related to salvation itself, baptism is meant to be a visible sign (not unlike circumcision in God's covenant with Israel) that someone has 'counted the cost' and chosen to covenant with God. In other words, the 'washing' implies an educated commitment.

A common practice in the early church (still done in some Christian circles today) was to spend perhaps many months training a new 'believer' before baptism to ensure they understood what they were about to do. Contrast the practice with our Western tendency to get someone to say a 'sinner's prayer' and seek baptism with little or no knowledge of the God with whom they're supposed to covenant!

So, dunk, dip, or sprinkle as long as the recipient ends up as more than just wet!

Blessings,

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