

REBAPTISM

OF THOSE PREVIOUSLY BAPTIZED ON THEIR CONFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST: WHY OR WHY NOT?

Can the insincerity of one who is baptized, *void* the baptism?

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM REQUIRED

Christian baptism is taught in the Bible as a one time event, in which the convert publicly confesses that he made Christ his choice, and vows to live for Him. It is a figure of salvation, like the waters of the flood, not in the cleansing of the body, but as the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:20-21). It is only to be given to professing believers (Acts 8:37).

In Acts 19, Paul found some who had only been baptized “Unto John’s baptism”. Paul explained to them that John’s message was “that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Baptism unto anything else cannot take the place of Christian baptism.

During the reformation, the Anabaptists who had been baptized as infants were “rebaptized” as adults on their confession of faith. They had not believed or confessed anything and had nothing to do with their infant baptism.

In both cases above, the individuals had never been baptized on their confession of faith in Christ.

Some who had previously been baptized as adults on their confession of faith in Christ are questioning the validity of their baptismal vows. They feel they were not sincere or knowledgeable enough at their original baptism, and this could perhaps invalidate their vows, because it is God’s plan that only sincere, born again believers are baptized.

Christian baptism is baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on the individual’s own confession of faith:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:” (Mat. 28:19)

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” (Acts 8:37)

THE BAPTISMAL VOWS AND CONFESSIONS

In our setting, the applicant for baptism is required to complete several months of instruction classes in which the concepts of God, sin, and the plan of salvation are simply explained. This is designed to make it virtually impossible for anyone of responsible age and intellect to not understand the necessary basics of salvation before baptism. He is required to publicly and verbally confess that he “believes in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” that he is “sincerely sorry for the sins (he has) committed,” and vow to “renounce (his) own will and all dark Satanic deeds” and “by God’s grace and help to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ faithfully and obediently unto death.”

But man cannot see into the heart. What if he was insincere in making these confessions and vows? What if he *didn't* actually believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? What if in his heart he was *not* sorry for his sins, and had *no intention* to renounce them and follow the teaching of Jesus? Can his insincerity invalidate his vows?

Before we answer that directly, let's look at another similar vow. Marriage is another ordinance that is figurative of our relationship with Christ. There are also obvious requirements for marriage. Marriage, like baptism is a life commitment that is only to be entered upon by the sincere who know what they are getting into. Selfish, carnal man has misused both ordinances.

There are many marriages today without even a serious relationship or commitment to each other. Many couples do not realize the commitment marriage is, and they enter it without sincerity. Often it is approached with the idea that "if it doesn't work out, there's always divorce."

Does the fact that someone entered marriage without sincerity and without making a heart commitment, invalidate the vows he made verbally? Does the fact that he didn't realize the character of his spouse when he married her, release him from his obligations to her? Since marriage is supposed to be a commitment, if they really weren't committed in heart when they made the vows, are the vows invalid?

No. We know that vows made by one of accountable age and intellect and especially those made before God and man will stand, whether made properly and with sincerity or not, and whether or not the individual realized what the commitment would involve. The vows do not mean a happy relationship, but they do mean the couple *is married*. In the same way, if someone is baptized though not sincere, he is not saved, but he *is baptized*.

In the cases of both marriage and baptism (or any vows or confessions - God holds us to what we *confess* to believe), not fulfilling them can never invalidate them, rather, *it is sin against the vow*. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar..." (Rom. 3:4) Although man may lie or go back on His word, God does not. He holds us accountable. If a vow were invalidated just because we do not perform what was vowed, there could be no sin in breaking our vows.

In Acts 8 we find that Simon the Samaritan was baptized, but "his heart was not right with God." Peter told him to repent and pray to God for forgiveness. He did not ask him to be rebaptized.

SOME FACTS ABOUT REBAPTISM OF THOSE PREVIOUSLY BAPTIZED ON THEIR CONFESSION OF FAITH:

- It is never once taught or mentioned in the Scriptures. This is in spite of the fact that it is clear there were problems with false brethren, hypocrites and gross sin in the church. We find exhortation to repentance and confession, but never rebaptism.
- Rebaptism assumes by necessity that the first baptism is invalid. This excuses all insincerity and unfaithfulness both in making it and breaking it, because there is no guilt in "breaking" something that is invalid to start with. This is contrary, not only to Scripture, but common sense as well. God holds us responsible for all our vows, confessions and commitments made before Him.
- To be consistent, baptism must be treated as any other confession or vow made before God. We place great importance on every other such vow or confession, realizing that "what is bound on earth is bound in heaven" and man cannot invalidate it. Marriage is one example. We know it stands regardless of our insincerity and unfaithfulness. In every case, unfaithfulness is *sin* against our vows. It can never invalidate them.

WHY DO WE WANT TO TREAT BAPTISMAL VOWS DIFFERENTLY THAN ANY OTHER VOWS?

There are several reasons this is being questioned:

1. We are living in a time of unfaithfulness. Confessions, vows and promises mean little to people of today. "Sure, I promised to do that but I wasn't really serious. I didn't realize what I was committing to." Marriage vows, likewise are not expected to be binding if it isn't working out. It is assumed that "If I'm not sincere in making it, I don't have to keep it." But the Bible says otherwise.
2. One of Satan's tactics is to feed our pride, and make us want to "save face." It is our nature to not want to repent and acknowledge sin, which is the Scriptural thing to do when we have been unfaithful to our vows. Rebaptism necessarily implies that the first baptism was void, so there is no sin against it.
3. Recently some aspects of sacramentalism are infiltrating some conservative groups and confusing the distinction between baptism, salvation, and the new birth.
4. There seems to be some confusion about the difference between a vow being valid and being in the will of God. A marriage that is not according to the will of God is still a valid marriage. Likewise with baptism.
5. Satan is using the same tactics he used on Eve in Genesis 3: the power of suggestion. "Hath God said?" I believe our answer should be what Eve's also should have been:

Yes, God *hath* said, "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for **the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.**" (Deut. 23:21)

Yes, God *hath* said, "**Whatever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: ...**" (Mat. 18:18)

Yes, God *hath* said, "**let God be true, but every man a liar.**" (Rom. 3:4)

Yes, God *hath* said, "**Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of ... baptism**" (Heb. 6:1,2)

The validity of both marriage and baptism does not rest on either our sincerity or faithfulness, but *in the confessions and vows made before God*, which the Bible tells us are "bound in heaven". At the same time, we do not obtain salvation through baptism, but baptism is a figure of salvation (1 Peter 3:21). If we are baptized with insincerity, we are not saved, but we **are baptized**. If we told untruths to obtain baptism or we continue in unfaithfulness, we are guilty of sin against our confessions and vows. The only solution is repentance and surrender of the heart to God. Our vows *cannot* be invalidated.

Baptism is for the sincere and committed. However, if you were not in the right spirit when you were baptized, you are not excused from your vows, but have sinned against them. The remedy is not to be rebaptized - *rebaptism will not in any way "forgive" the past sins against your former vows*. The only solution is to repent and ask God's forgiveness. If that has been done, there is no need to repeat the baptismal vows, which according to God's Word, have already been heard and "bound in heaven."

Let us stand for the seriousness of baptism, realizing that it cannot be invalidated by man's insincerity and unfaithfulness. It is an ordinance, like marriage, that God recognizes, and sin against it, far from invalidating it, is sin against our soul.

~Glenn M. Wenger