

GRACE Through FAITH Explained

By examining the proper techniques of how to study the bible, it is my goal that any person reading it could learn how to examine the scriptures carefully and be able to discover the truth about God's grace as the Holy Spirit intended it.

It is also my hope that all Christians would hold the bible as the very words of God more reliable and more credible than anyone's personal interpretation or traditions as passed down through the different denominations and various nondenominational churches.

Finally it is my hope that by doing so, we will reach unity in the faith we have come to hold so dear to each of us.

EPHESIANS 2

Question: Is Water Baptism a "work of man's righteousness" or "God's work of Grace?"

Let's begin by examining passages from these two letters written by Paul.

Ephesians 2:4-9 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.

Now read Titus 3:3-7 (listed here below)

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Notice the similarities of these two letters both written by Paul:

What we used to be prior to Christ:

a) "Disobedient" (quoted verbatim in both)

b) Sin is described as a way of life before coming to Christ. (Found in both)

God demonstrated unmerited or unearned favor towards us:

a) Ephesians “by grace you have been saved...not by works”

b) Titus “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done...having been justified by his grace.”

God showed us undeserved “mercy” through his sacrifice of Christ.

a) Ephesians “God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.”

b) Titus “...not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

What motivated God to save us:

a) Ephesians: “because of his great love...expressed in his kindness”

b) Titus: “the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared”

So far these two verses when compared to each other seem to match up almost identically. They should since they are both written by the Apostle Paul, however look what happens when we compare this next point:

How did he choose to “save” us: (Bring us from the state of death and separation from God to a new life in Christ?)

a) Ephesians “through faith”

b) Titus “through the washing of rebirth”

Whoa! Look at that! What happened? Does scripture contradict itself? No way! "God is not a God of disorder but of peace." (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Many church denominations read these passages like these and then take either one extreme or the other and so you have divisions in the "body" of Christ ie: Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans & Calvinists etc.

Those that favor the Galatians verse become known as "faith only" people...who down play baptism as a "work" of man and believe it has no bearing on salvation.

Others that favor the commands to baptize have "over played" baptism and have become known as "water regenerationists" and have erred in instructing that it is the "water only" that saves and they take to baptizing infants who have no faith, hoping that later they will come to believe.

Neither extreme is correct.

So what is REALLY being said here by God through the Apostle Paul?

In the Titus passage, the "washing of rebirth" describes and refers to our water baptism in the name of Jesus. (See John 3:3-5, Acts 22:16 & Romans 6:1-11) This washing assumes faith already exists, in fact baptism IS the act of FAITH expressing your desire to join into the new covenant made in Christ's blood. During baptism we are placing complete trust in God's plan for saving us, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not the water we put our trust in to be somehow extra "holy." We trust in Jesus Christ during baptism as only He is Holy and has the power to save as proven by his resurrection. Baptism in the name of Jesus is God's idea of

how to cleanse us from sin and unite us with Christ; it is not a work created by man.

Consider the highlighted sections here in reading the following verses concerning baptism:

Romans 6:3-11

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-29

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Colossians 2:11-13

“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...”

Now that you have read the above verses, let us test the understanding that faith is necessary during baptism. By faith I am implying that one believes in God's ability to save through the finished work of Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. In comparing only these scriptures on baptism and salvation (previously mentioned above and now listed below) you'll find that baptism is connected to the faith of the believer.

Colossians: "Raised with him through your FAITH in the power of God, who raised him from the dead"

Ephesians: "by Grace you have been saved through FAITH".

Galatians: "You are all sons of God through FAITH"

Romans: "if we died with Christ, we BELIEVE that we will also live with him"

So you may say, "Ok, I get it." Faith is necessary and only those with Faith should be baptized. "But, you say, 'that doesn't clear up the NEED to be baptized for salvation because Ephesians says we are saved by "Grace through Faith". It does not mention baptism in the text and therefore baptism is not necessary to be saved. Right?"

I would reply, "Now don't be hasty!"

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way." Proverbs 19:2

Remember that the same author who wrote Ephesians also wrote the letter to Titus. What did Paul say to him: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth." So baptism seems to be important for salvation. Is it possible then that Paul did mention baptism in Ephesians? Is it possible to find baptism described in the context of the Grace of God?

YES! Baptism can be found in Ephesians 2

And I'll show you what the Lord has shown to me:

In examining scripture we see that water baptism symbolizes the "death, burial, and resurrection" experience "uniting" ourselves to Christ's literal "baptism" of suffering or death, burial, and resurrection done to save us. In fact Christ himself references his own death, burial and resurrection as a "baptism" in these words found in Luke 12:50 (NIV),

"But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!"

When the Apostle Paul refers to our baptism into Christ he often uses descriptive word pictures such as: "Died with Christ", "Crucified with him", "Buried with him", "Clothed with Christ" "Raised with him", "Made Alive with Christ". These have become a "signature" of his so to speak. In fact the Apostle Peter testifies to this evidence as he says:

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the SAME WAY in ALL his LETTERS, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." ~2 Peter 3:15-16

Now let's test the "word pictures" found in Ephesians with the other texts also written by Paul to see if baptism is found in its context:

Romans: "baptized into his death," "buried with him through baptism," "united with him in his resurrection" & "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:1-11)

Colossians: "buried with him in baptism" "raised with him", and "God made you alive with Christ" (Colossians 2:11-12)

Ephesians: "God... made us alive with Christ" & "raised us up with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-9)

Paul's letter to the Ephesians uses nearly the exact wording as Romans and Colossians albeit without mentioning baptism by name. It is safe to say by this careful examination that Paul describes and refers to it because of the familiar word pictures he uses in the text. Take a look at Ephesians 2:4-7 Observe Grace in context considering Paul's "word pictures" of Baptism:

Ephesians 2:4-7 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Like Paul, we as Christians should be able to defend baptism's part in the salvation of a believer within the context of the amazing "GRACE" of God,

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves,"

Baptism then can be said to be... "The gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So faith and baptism go hand in hand they are inseparable in these passages and Paul's letters do not contradict each other. (Aren't we all relieved!)?

However, some biblical scholars still insist that baptism is a "work of man's righteousness" done after salvation has occurred by faith. To test this belief let's examine the verses mentioned earlier and add this one from 1 Peter as well.

1 Peter 3:18-21 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

Colossians 2:11-13 "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins..."

The water baptism is a symbol of Christ's "baptism" or his death, burial and resurrection done on our behalf. When we get baptized we are "uniting with him" in the work he has done to save us. This is HIS work he does in us while we are being baptized as we place our faith in him:

Colossians: "not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision DONE BY CHRIST."

Colossians: "GOD MADE you alive with Christ"

Ephesians: "this NOT from yourselves, it is the GIFT OF GOD."

1 Peter: "It saves you by the RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST"

As these passages demonstrated, it is during the act of physical water baptism done in the name of Jesus where this "uniting" for salvation or joining with Christ by faith takes place. The transformation takes place at this time. Baptism into Jesus is the moment of transformation: our old sinful lives "dying" and being "buried" with Christ in the waters of baptism by FAITH, so that a new (spiritual) life cleansed from sin is raised out of the water by God through our FAITH in his power which he used to resurrect Christ from the dead. Christian baptism is a gift of God who offers salvation because of his grace to us in Christ Jesus. Baptism=Grace through faith.

I hope by studying these verses that anyone can clearly recognize that baptism is not man's creation or "work of man's own righteousness." Baptism into Jesus (performed by immersion in water) is a symbol of the work Christ has already done on the cross and will do for us upon placing faith in him during this act.

The salvation process is a combination of God's work done through Jesus on our behalf (His Offer to us) and our RECEIVING it by faith as we "unite" with him during baptism placing faith in God's power to save us through the death burial and resurrection of Jesus.

What do you think? Did that make sense? I know it is long. I hope you grasped the concept of God's work of Grace in our being baptized. It's a good idea to read through this again to be sure you grasp the concept. Let God's Spirit show you the truth held out in the Gospel as he has shown me.

Anyone who wants more explanation can email me privately and I will be happy to discuss this more back & forth with mutual respect and love toward one another.

HALELUJAH!

~Bonnie Winberg

~A Workman for the Lord Jesus

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." Colossians 1:28