

“HE THAT BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED”

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In Mark 16:16 Jesus Christ spoke on the subject of what God requires of man for his eternal salvation: “*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.*” In this verse, Jesus teaches as clearly as it can be taught that baptism is essential to salvation. Most denominations teach that salvation is by “faith only” and, therefore, they teach that baptism is unessential for salvation. It should not be difficult to see what the consequences would be if we are persuaded not to do something that the Lord says we *must* do in order to be saved. Therefore, a thorough study and proper understanding of Christ’s teachings in Mark 16:16 are vital to all of our souls.

Salvation by faith, but not faith only

We should take note that Mark 16:16 is just one of many passages in the New Testament that teach about what is required for man’s eternal salvation. We must avoid approaching the Bible the way that Satan did in Matthew 4:5-6. There, the Devil accurately quoted a prophecy about God’s use of angels to protect Christ when he was on the earth. But Satan lifted that one passage out by itself, and *ignored* the remainder of what God spoke on the same subject. In contrast, Jesus “compared spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13), and put *everything* God said together. He overcame Satan’s misapplication of scripture by saying, “It is written *again*” (Matt 4:7). By the same token, the Lord does indeed teach that faith is necessary for our eternal salvation (John 3:16; 8:24), but nowhere does God say that is *all* that a man must do in order to be saved. James 2:14-17 says, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*” Further down in the same text, James 2:24 states plainly: “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*” It is interesting that these are the only times that the phrases “faith alone” and “faith only” are used in the scriptures, and the Lord says that man is *not saved by faith alone, is not justified by faith only!* Faith by itself is dead. Only a faith that demonstrates works of obedience is alive and will save a person (Jas 2:14-26). Therefore, though we certainly must believe in Christ in order to be saved, we must also *obey him* in order to be saved (Heb 5:9).

The necessity of baptism for eternal salvation

Being baptized into Christ is part (though not all) of what we must do to be saved. That is why Jesus said, “He that believes *and* is baptized shall be saved.” The rest of the New Testament scriptures also teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. For example, Galatians 3:27 says that baptism puts

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one into Christ (i.e. that is how one becomes a Christian). Those who are outside of Christ have no hope and are without God in the world (Eph 2:12). Therefore, without baptism, there is no hope for eternity. Since being in Christ is necessary for salvation, and since baptism puts one into Christ, then baptism is necessary for salvation. In the same way, baptism puts a person into the “one body” (1 Cor 12:13; Acts 2:47), which is the Lord’s church (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18). Christ will only save those in that body (Eph 5:23; see also Heb 12:23 + Rev 20:16; 21:27). Therefore, since being in the church of Christ is necessary for salvation, and since baptism puts one into the church, then baptism is necessary for salvation. Acts 2:38 says that baptism is “for the remission of sins,” and Acts 22:16 teaches that through baptism our sins are washed away. Those who die in their sins cannot go to heaven where Christ is (John 8:21-24), because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Since the remission of sins is necessary for salvation, and since baptism is necessary to obtain the remission of sins, then baptism is necessary for salvation. Romans 6:3-6 teaches us that being baptized into Christ’s death is our only hope of one day being in the likeness of his resurrection. Only by being resurrected like Christ do we have any hope of eternal life (1 Cor 15:35-57; 1 Pet 1:3-4). Therefore, since being in the likeness of Christ’s resurrection is necessary for eternal life, and since baptism is necessary for being in the likeness of Christ’s resurrection, then baptism is necessary for eternal salvation. As Mark 16:16 and all the other passages about baptism also teach, so also 1 Peter 3:21 declares plainly that “*baptism does also now save us.*”

He that believes not

Some people try to get around the clear statement of Christ that one must believe *and* be baptized in order to be saved by pointing out that Jesus did not say, “But he that believes not *and is baptized not* shall be damned” in the second part of Mark 16:16. They claim that this means baptism is *not* required for salvation. But it was not necessary for Jesus to say, “But he that believes not *and is baptized not* shall be damned.” One who does not believe cannot be baptized into Christ (Acts 8:35-39). That would be some other baptism than the “one baptism” of the New Testament (Eph 4:5). Therefore, it is redundant to say, “But he that believes not *and is baptized not* shall be damned.” It is quite sufficient (and even more telling) to simply say, “But he that believes not shall be damned.” The necessity of baptism is indisputably established in the first part of the phrase, when Jesus said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” That automatically means that whoever does not believe *and* whoever is not baptized will be damned. Baptism *is* essential for eternal salvation!